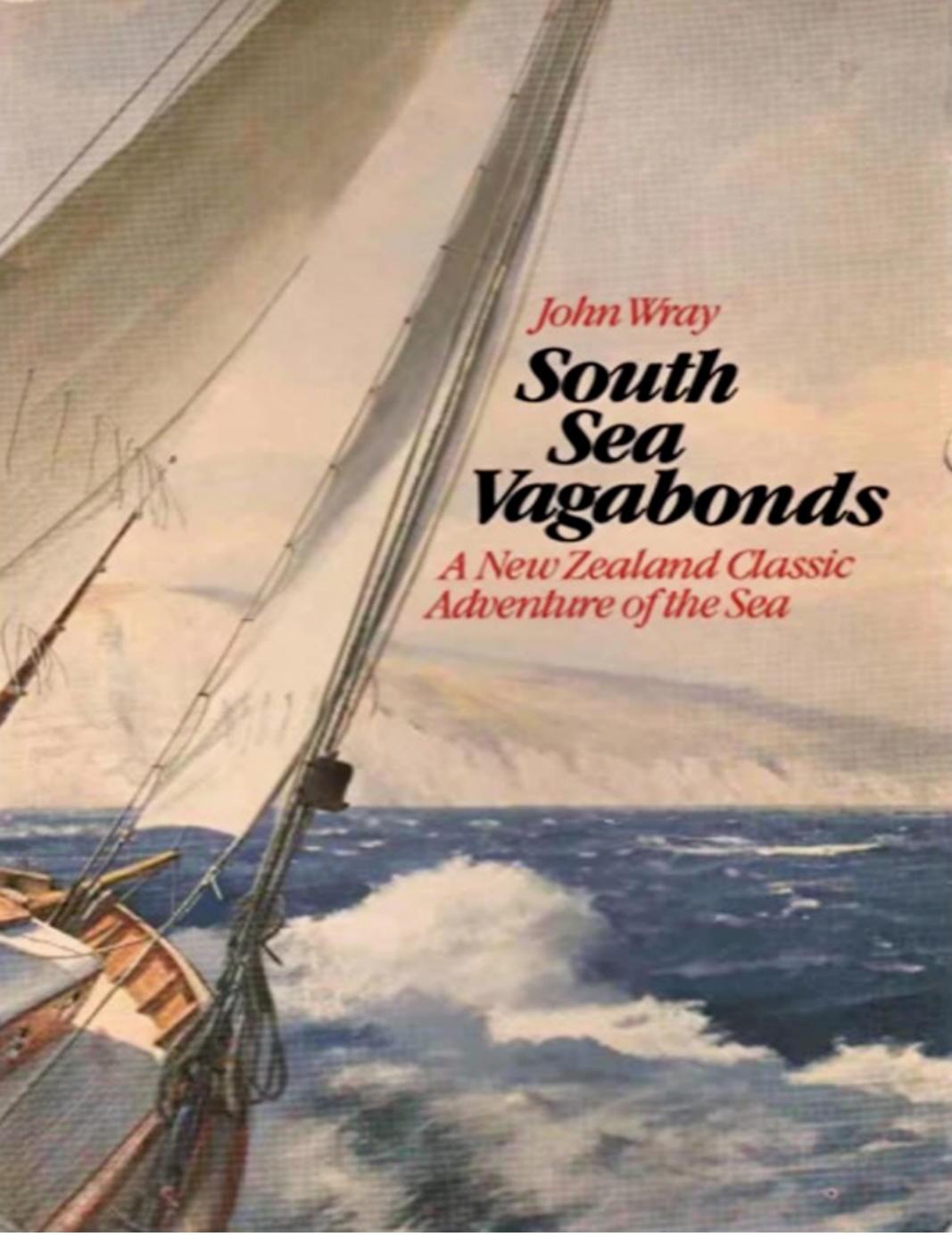

John Wray
South Sea Vagabonds
A New Zealand Classic Adventure of the Sea

SOUTH SEA VAGABONDS

South Sea Vagabonds

BY

J. W. Wray

HERBERT JENKINS

First published by
Herbert Jenkins, Ltd.
3 Duke of York Strett,
London, S.W.I.
1939

To
MY MOTHER

Introduction

by Bruce Ansley

from 2016 edition

This book changed lives.

John Stansfield read *South Sea Vagabonds* when he was a university student. He was fascinated, could not put it down. He even read it furtively in lectures. What was the point of textbooks when white sails bellied in trade winds? He went to Auckland, found an unfinished trailer-sailer, completed it, lived on it.

Putiki Bay on Waiheke Island was the first place he sailed to. He found out that Johnny Wray lived there, on Shelly Beach Road. He sailed through a huge school of kahawai, caught lots, smoked them on a beach, filled a kete, anchored in front of Johnny's boatshed and climbed the steep path to his house. As luck would have it, the old sailor was both home and hungry. John Stansfield greeted him with: "Wray, you old bugger, you ruined my life, the least you can do is invite me in." Johnny, taken aback, did. They became friends, or at least friendly.

Andrew Fagan - once lead singer of pop group The Mockers, then writer and radio host traced Johnny's steps in an even less likely craft than the *Ngataki*, famously built of driftwood. He bought a tiny, bright-green beetle of a boat, only 5.4 metres long, and, inspired by the book, sailed alone to Johnny's favourite Sunday Island, now called Raoul Island, the largest in the Kermadecs and 1100 kilometres north-north-east of New Zealand. Like his hero, he learned to navigate on the way with a second-hand sextant, and Wray-like was rather surprised when he found the island. "Unrestrained jubilation. My navigation had worked." Later, Andrew emulated Johnny Wray's feat and sailed in a race across the Tasman to Australia, although unlike Johnny he did the race single handed. Then back again.

He, too, met Johnny Wray in Shelly Beach Road, one rock star to another. "A weathered man came to greet me . . . His face resembled the young man in the book except for the loose, leathered look ... I was star-struck."

Perhaps he should have persevered. Johnny was often seen as reclusive by people who did not know him well, and there were plenty of those. His book made him a celebrity, and a stream of putative vagabonds knocked on his door: sailors, adventurers, dreamers. In fact, in the company of strangers, he was reserved.

Sometimes the book did the world a service. A very young Ed Saul found

a lesson in it: "If you want to do something enough, you can do it." Later in life he took early retirement and lived mainly in Rarotonga, working on the recovery of one of the world's rarest birds, the kakerori or Rarotonga flycatcher, a task which had him sailing throughout the South Seas. "Who knows how many of these places I would have sailed to if I hadn't read *South Sea Vagabonds* so many years ago?"

South Sea Vagabonds began with Johnny being sacked from his draughtsman's job during the Great Depression. So many made redundant since then were urged to follow their dreams. Unlike most, Johnny did. The book ended with the *Ngataki* anchored in a lagoon off an island so alluring that the reader can smell the passionflower; his girlfriend Loti singing on the reef, and our hero contemplating a swim in azure water.

But where did Johnny Wray come from? Where did he go? What of Loti?

John William George Branford Wray was born in 1910. He came from 94 Lucerne Road, Remuera, Auckland, son of Major W.G. Wray and May Wray. Major Wray MC (Military Cross) was a senior officer with the Railways Department, a veteran of the Boer War and World War I.

The Wrays had two children, Johnny and his younger brother, Geoffrey. A family photograph shows Major Wray in full uniform, clipped moustache, medal ribbons on his chest. The two sons, neatly dressed, hair cut short, look set for Queen Street careers. Mrs Wray stands behind the men of the family.

How might the Major and Mrs Wray have felt when their elder son was first fired and then embarked on the raffish path he followed until he died? Lucerne Road was even then deepest Remuera, where a boat slowly rising under a ramshackle tin shed in the garden would now raise a storm of calls to the city council. What thoughts crossed Mrs Wray's mind when she opened her oven door and smelled the tar in which Johnny had been baking his fencing-wire plank fastenings?

A man did not earn a Military Cross by insisting on a safe and comfortable life, but even so there must have been something eccentric in the family's make-up. Johnny's adventures were the talk of Auckland during his hey-day, but his younger brother, Geoff, who crewed on some of those voyages, created a national sensation. Newspapers reported, in December 1933, that Geoff and two mates had been gold-mining on the Coromandel (surely not a common occupation among the sons of Remuera) when they had a wonderful idea. They would go to Wellington and, according to Geoff's diary, "stow away on an Australian boat and fool off around the world".

In Wellington they changed their plans. Admiral Richard E. Byrd was about to set off on his second expedition to the Antarctic. The trio apparently tried to join the expedition. Refused, they stowed away in a lifeboat on the expedition ship, the *Jacob Ruppert.* Eight hours out of Wellington the crew held a boat drill and the three young men were discovered. "Turning back to Wellington was out of the question," the *Evening Post* reported, "so Admiral Byrd was forced to put them to work as deck hands." According to the

Auckland Star, "The explorer, it would appear, has a big heart and a deep admiration for any young men genuinely seeking adventure."

Perhaps this sentiment was the key to Major Wray's outlook. He merely remarked, publicly at least, that his son had a good physique and was likely to settle down to life on the expedition ship. Clearly the major was not averse to adventure either. Put together with the couple's tolerant view of Johnny's boat-building, there seems to be an underlying respect for their wayward sons' choices, although Geoff's life ended dreadfully. While he survived all of his *Ngataki* voyages, as a seaman sometime after World War II he fell from the mast of one of the Union Steam Ship Company colliers in Greymouth and died.

This was the family Johnny Wray came from: middle-class, wealthy by the standards of the time, tolerant. Losing his job was the catalyst for his new life: *".. the ambition I had cherished for many years: to go cruising around the tropical islands of the South Pacific in my own ship"*.

War and depression had created what marine historian Harold Kidd called a "sea gypsy culture". "Starting in the twenties people from England and other places began this move to get the Great War behind them and get the hell out of the place. They sailed all over the world."

Lieutenant G.H.P. Muhlhauser caused quite a stir when he and his yacht *Amaryllis* arrived in Auckland from England by way of the South Pacific in 1923. *The New Zealand Herald* was entranced by his exotic appearance. "His crew consists of a Central American Indian and a French Creole ..."

Erling Tambs had to sneak out of Norway with his wife and young son in the yacht *Teddy*, because, even by the standards of the day, they were so badly equipped that the authorities judged them foolhardy. The family had no money, just spirit, and, relying on Providence, they sailed blithely for the South Seas. In New Zealand they had a daughter, Tui. Leaving the Hauraki Gulf they were wrecked on Challenger Island at the southern tip of Kawau Island. All were saved.

Although he crewed on the boat, Johnny did not appear in Tambs's book *The Cruise of the Teddy*. Yet Tambs, and especially the *Teddy*, became Johnny's model; he tried to copy the old pilot boat as much as possible in his own *Ngataki*.

George Dibbern, Johnny's adversary in the Trans Tasman Race to Melbourne, and in a subsequent race from Melbourne to Hobart, was a German who had been interned on Somes Island in Wellington harbour during World War I. He returned to Germany after the war, didn't like it, went broke, left his family, and sailed his home-built *Te Rapunga* back to New Zealand, arriving at Devonport in March 1934. Dibbern was a fine raconteur, a rakish character who outraged New Zealand by sailing with a young, unmarried Napier woman, Eileen Morris, as crew. Letter-writers suggested he be horse-whipped. Harold Kidd's mother thought him an evil man and wouldn't let him in the house. On Dibbern's return in 1941, the *Te Rapunga* was seized and

Dibbern returned to Somes Island. "The sea is still the kingdom of the vagabond," he once told *The New Zealand Herald*, a sentiment which obviously impressed Johnny.

Johnny's great friend and frequent crewmate Dick Wellington, who appears Adonis-like in crew photographs, came from a wealthy background and dropped out of school. Scores of other young men would drop everything given the chance to hop aboard a boat and sail away. This was the culture that Johnny's dreams grew from, a world so ringed by apocalypse that sailing offered freedom, release, beauty.

Building a boat in the back yard was not uncommon then. In Devonport especially, several were being built at any one time. Harold Kidd remembered Bert Woollacott, one of New Zealand's most enduring designers, riding his bicycle from site to site, advising, helping. "I went to Devonport school and Takapuna Grammar and all around me were boats being built, mainly Woollacotts ... it was just buzzing with boats. But building an ocean cruiser from driftwood and fencing wire for virtually nothing *was* unusual."

The Depression inspired Johnny. It also made him famous, largely through W.A. "Wilkie' Wilkinson, who first founded a high-quality yachting magazine then became the yachting correspondent for the *Auckland Star*, writing under the name "Speedwell". Wilkie promoted centreboard sailing so well that, in Harold Kidd's words, "Suddenly the whole of New Zealand was connected with centreboard yachts. He got the country going with yachting."

The Great Depression nipped the flowering sport in the bud. Nor were many yachts and launches being built. Wilkie was desperate for copy. Johnny was a gift: a man in the great New Zealand mould, resourceful, independent, in a boat made from nothing, bringing the allure of the South Seas within everyone's reach. A battler. A perfect fit.

This was Speedwell's account of Johnny Wray's South Pacific cruise to Tahiti in 1935: "The crew ... are having a wonderfully good time. The weather is fine and warm, with steady trade winds prevailing most of the time, which tempers the heat, and at each island at which they have called the crew have been very well treated, both by Europeans and the natives ... A native feast, followed by a dance, was held in honour of the *Ngataki's* crew ... The day they arrived at Niue a big fleet of native canoes met them outside the reef and escorted the yacht to moorings. The water is so clear that the bottom is easily seen in 20 fathoms ... "

Imagine the effect of descriptions like that on a New Zealand emerging from the sugar-bag years. Speedwell's account taunted his readers with the brush of bougainvillea. Paradise lay just over the horizon, and if Johnny could afford it, anyone could.

He didn't look like a hero short, slight, thick round glasses. Dick Wellington was much more in the mould tall, dark, handsome, carefree (for the skipper carried a boat's worries, not the crew). Wellington was killed in World War II flying over Germany as a navigator. A contemporary

description had Johnny "quiet to the point of shyness. His horn-rimmed glasses and high forehead give him a scholarly and almost ineffective appearance. He is entirely without frill, either in dress or in manner. But he is as strong as an ox, and utterly without fear. That quiet slow smile of his, and the blue twinkling eyes mark a keen and purposeful personality. New Zealand may well be proud of Johnny Wray." Said Harold Kidd, "You cannot overestimate the way Johnny Wray and Wilkie Wilkinson just spurred a generation of people who took to the water."

In the South Seas, Loti was there to greet Johnny and join the crew. (*"Once more we played and danced and sang. Once more we listened to the guitars over the quiet lagoon. One more we sailed on the sparkling blue waters around the Friendly Isles, with our white sails bellying to the warm, steady trade winds."*)

Johnny married her, of course, at least once. His diaries for 1936, the year he made a single-handed voyage to Tonga - the first ever solo ocean voyage by a New Zealander - showed an entry dated 14 October, recording that they married in the village of Maufaunga. The next day they went back to Loti's village of Bangimotu for a picnic. (The spellings are Johnny's.) Perhaps they married again, in New Zealand. As a child, Brently Ford, from a neighbouring family, remembered a wedding. And Johnny's albums contained a photograph Loti dressed in a typically New Zealand hat, Johnny in uniform - which looked very much like a wedding portrait.

Nineteen thirty-nine was a big year for Johnny Wray. *South Sea Vagabonds* was published and acclaimed. War broke out. He joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force and became a navigator with 40 Squadron on DC3s until, he said later, they found he was colour-blind and transferred him to air-sea rescue boats based in Mechanics Bay. About this time, he bought three sections in Shelly Beach Road, on Waiheke Island. Sections there ran down to the sea on both sides of the road and were to become expensive, but he was the first resident.

Later he shared his street with salty characters: Bill Belcher was wrecked on Middleton Reef in the Tasman Sea during a solo Trans-Tasman race in 1978 (he had won the race in 1974) and, at sixty-six, spent twenty nine days drifting in a life-raft. His wife, Aileen Belcher, later contributed an immortal line about the aging Johnny: "He's rusting on his laurels." (Said in jest, but still possibly a little harsh: in 1980, for example, Johnny was made a life member of the Royal Akarana Yacht Club for services to yachting.)

Johnny's neighbour and soul-mate was Harry Sooma, who had escaped from Estonia during World War II, kept his savings in United States dollars and gold, carried scars from knife fights, lost an eye working on fishing boats, and later sat with a weeping Johnny on the wharf as his last boat, *Waihape*, sailed away under a new owner. A young friend of Harry's, Neil Morris, was later to feel Johnny's presence as he navigated his own boat through the night

in the South Pacific. Neil named his coffee business after Johnny Wray, and inherited photograph albums and a leather-bound log book from the *Ngataki*.

Johnny built a house and a jetty beside a large green boatshed, where he constructed the *Waihape*, selling the *Ngataki* to pay for it. He went from Spartan fittings and a notoriously unreliable engine to all home comforts, including a fresh-water shower, two Lister engines, a wheelhouse where he could stay out of the weather, and an enormous switchboard with controls so complex that his notes for starting the engines took a whole page.

The *Waihape* was a curious vessel. He built her of traditional materials: that is, washed-up kauri. In 1977 he told Bernard Rhodes, writing for the island newspaper *Gulf News*, that during the war he found one big kauri log, half-buried in shingle on the Whangaparoa Peninsula. The Army, which had a camp there, claimed the log as their own and mounted a guard with fixed bayonets. Johnny, with some experience in lost logs, knew it belonged to the Receiver of Wrecks until claimed. He found the brand on the log, contacted the owners and bought it. Still the Army would not let him take it. He showed them the receipt, dug out the log and rolled it into the tide, and towed it away with a little launch, the *Sprat*, which he had built on his days off from the Air Force for commuting from Waiheke Island. The Army told the Navy not to open an anti-submarine boom which blocked off the harbour in wartime. So Johnny went the other way, slipped around the Noises (a string of rocky islets to the north of Waiheke Island) then into Putiki Bay to lie low.

The *Sprat* was painted dark blue. He used it for sneaking past the harbour boom at night through a little gap left for dinghies near the Tamaki Yacht Club, dodging the searchlights and patrol boats. "They never did catch me," he told Bernard Rhodes. "If I saw a searchlight coming my way, I'd cut the throttle and turn stern-to. They'd pick up the bow-wave otherwise." Always the vagabond.

It took him five years to build - much longer than the *Ngataki* but the *Waihape* was eventually finished. He described her in 1949 like this: "All the things I wanted in my dream boat were put in a pot and boiled up with the result that the finished boat turned out like nothing on earth." She was big 13.5 metres long had two short masts to carry sail, and a "turtle" deck with a varnished wheelhouse at the back. She may not have been beautiful, but she was seaworthy. She made at least four return trips to Tonga, and with Loti he cruised up the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. At home Johnny used her for fishing, selling the fish locally. She would nose into the wharf at Matiatia, where the ferries berthed, and sell fish there, or anchor in shallow water at Oneroa: Toni-Anne Shaw remembers wading out to the boat with her father, buying fish from Johnny off the back. Even so, life could be exciting. He once described pulling up a big octopus in 1959: the animal grabbed the rudder and swung it so hard that the tiller broke Johnny's neck.

Johnny was a kindly man. As a child, Dave Collins was taken under Johnny's wing after Loti took an interest in him. She arranged a surprise. Go

down to the Ostend wharf, she said. As he stood on the worn planking, Johnny came by in the *Waihape* and shouted "Jump!" That started a relationship which shaped Dave's life. They would go fishing, and Dave lived for it. "We'd have Weet-Bix and fruit for breakfast, and I spent most of my spare days from school with him." On one trip to Great Barrier Island, Johnny said he had to catch a kingfish and closed on Channel Island between the Barrier and the Coromandel Peninsula. They moved through schools of trevally and kahawai until close to the rock where the kingfish were thick: "It looked as if you could walk over them." The swell crashed against the barren rock of the island and Dave was frightened, but Johnny got his kingfish and away he went.

He also let the young Dave Collins have a couple of shots from a pistol he kept under his pillow during his voyages, revealing a darker side to the Islands idyll. "He reckoned a couple of places up there were pretty dangerous." Johnny gave Dave his first dinghy and taught his protégé how to tie knots, steer a boat, allow for drift, make the most of currents, how to row, how to swim.

Johnny would take the *Waihape* to Clevedon on the Wairoa River, across from Waiheke Island, to get rid of barnacles and growth in the fresh water. He would have to stay for weeks, but "There was no urgency about him whatever. He made it so; he made his own way of life." Once he took the neighbouring Ford family to town as passengers. It was quite an occasion, and Loti spent several hours cleaning the boat for it, but he used only the smaller of the two engines in order to save fuel. Brently Ford recalls, "It took all day." Johnny had all day. When Rob Jackson and his mate Ernie came to finish off a concrete water tank, Johnny went out and caught a snapper for morning tea. Served with molasses pancakes.

Johnny caught sharks and used the oil as preservative for his house and boat. "Stinks a bit, but it's good." And once, when someone on the wharf asked Johnny if Dave was his boy, Johnny said yes, he was. And Dave was pretty pleased about that.

One day they saw a Navy ship out at sea. Johnny said, "You play your cards right and you could be on that one day." So Dave joined the Navy, and went on to a life at sea. "Johnny started it all. Now I'm not happy anywhere else."

Above all, Johnny remained true to his calling: beachcomber. His occupation on his income tax returns was "professional beachcomber". More accurately, a sea man.

As he grew older, Johnny seemed reclusive to some of his neighbours, and to visitors. John Cushen, a neighbour with a 9-metre yacht, collided with Johnny's wharf when his steering failed, so hiked up the path to his house with gifts of wine and vegetables. Like others, he found Johnny retiring. "I think you had to hit his wharf to see him." Closer friends remembered him as gregarious, always ready for a few drinks and a song. Sue Pragnell, whose

father Ken was a good friend, spent many long evenings at his house. "We'd sit around all night, they'd drink beer and he'd play the mandolin or the guitar or the mouth organ and we'd sing." She has a Dutch edition of Johnny's book dedicated "To my friend Ken Pragnell in appreciation of saving my life." And, in the back, a hint of high times: "God Bless the Duke of Argyle and all the members of the Royal Family."

Later in his life he met Gloria, who became a constant companion and cared for him as his illness worsened.

His young neighbour Russell Smith went to see him shortly before his death. Johnny reached out a thin hand. "So long Rusty," he said. Not long afterwards, in 1986, he died. He was seventy-six. Melanoma then leukaemia did what the sea could not. He left his estate to the Waiheke Red Cross and his body to medical science. Many of the people who had been old friends learned of his death only slowly. Dave Collins says, "Johnny didn't want people to make a fuss."

The old green boathouse, repaired, patched, a new window here, a door there, remained at the bottom of the garden. Inside, a clutter of stuff; everything the colour of old wood. Along a rafter in faded paint was a single name: *Waihape*. Johnny built a last boat there, sold unfinished. He said he would call it the *Waiwuri*.

Loti was born in Tonga in 1903, which made her seven years older than Johnny. Her name was Charlotte, middle name Salote. Harold Kidd believes she was one of the large group in Tonga descended from German traders. "Loti" was Johnny's spelling.

What did she make of her move from the bright, noisy island life to Shelly Beach Road? She made the best of it, of course.

Neighbours remembered her as kind and considerate, always ready to help people in the street, cooking, gardening, babysitting, bringing gifts of fruit, vegetables and fish, caring for others, but lonely. She and Johnny had no children. Kara Nelson met Johnny and Loti in 1959 - and promptly went sailing: he cruised along the coastline picking up wood for their fire. She returned in 1969 and bought a section in the same street, found Johnny easy to talk to, sociable, "very much a man of the world".

The dream faded somewhere, though. Johnny and Loti grew apart. Certainly she was feisty. A hint of discord can be found in the certificates of title for the Shelly Beach Road properties: Loti lodged caveats.

Who knew what went on inside a marriage? The facts were that Johnny built another house next door, makeshift. He called it the doghouse, for obvious reasons, and lived there when he wasn't aboard his boat. Loti lived alone in the bigger house.

Alas for the ever-faithful Loti. Kara liked, admired and felt sorry for her at the same time. "She was like a fish out of water there. She was an Island woman and used to that community life. She visited a lot of houses. She was

probably lonely. Johnny was away a lot of the time." Loti told Bernard Rhodes, "I keep telling Johnny he needs to grow up. He needs to get serious."

She was like a grandmother to Russell Smith, who spent much of his childhood in a house across the road with his brother and sister. "She was a very gentle lady. We loved her."

Loti died of cancer in 1977. Russell Smith delivered a paean. "I used to lie in the grass outside our house listening to her play her ukulele and sing." The music would drift on the warm summer air and the boy would dream of faraway places.

By his own count Johnny made at least twenty overseas voyages in the *Ngataki*, a boat so strong and reliable that, he once told the *Gulf News*, he and his mates "just used to decide one day that we would go and the next we'd be away". He was a man of his time. By century's end he would have drowned in an ocean of regulations.

The *Ngataki* outlived her builder. She went through several hands after Johnny sold her. Geoff Maurice read the book and dreamed of sailing in Johnny's wake. When he saw the *Ngataki* for sale in 1974, he bought her on the spot. He and his family lived aboard her for five years, moored in Opua. By then a Bermudan rig had replaced the old gaff rig, the ancient steel keel had gone, making the yacht's performance to windward even worse, and a big Lister engine had turned her into a motor sailer. He telephoned Johnny, who answered immediately. He said he hadn't answered the telephone for a couple of years, but Loti was in hospital and he was expecting news. Geoff sailed over to Waiheke Island and had a cup of tea with Johnny, who, however, did not go out to his old vessel. The *Ngataki* leaked badly, and Geoff re-caulked her. (Caulking forces fibrous material between the hull planks to make the vessel watertight.) When Johnny had run out of proper cotton caulking for the job, he'd used three shorts, a few pairs of old pyjamas and the odd singlet. Geoff could not tell whether any of the old clothing had survived; by then, all the cotton caulking looked the same.

The damage caused when the vessel fell off its trailer before its first launching could still be seen, but the old yacht's heavy planking and Johnny's wire fastenings were fine, although some were rusting through the paintwork. The hull was in such good condition more than forty years after her first launching that she was surveyed to go offshore and declared structurally excellent. Geoff updated the rig and fitted a new steel keel and got her sailing better. He traded the Lister with Johnny, who had a smaller Perkins, and the old sailor brought the engine over on the *Waihape*, loaded the Lister aboard and puttered off home, and that was the last Geoff saw of him. "He was keen on swimming in the nick and not having a lot of clothes. Not exactly bohemian, but certainly non-conformist. Something had tipped him over and I think it was meeting Erling Tambs and deciding he was going to do this, too. He lived very simply, he was cheerful, he had a good sense of humour."

Later, in another vessel, Geoff sailed some of the routes Johnny had navigated. He stopped in the Kermadecs, found the famous trees whose oranges Johnny had hoped to trade, and took bags of them. "They were beautiful."

Loti told him that the *Ngataki* used to trade liquor also, and later, when he judged that it no longer mattered, Johnny confessed to the *Gulf News* that he used to run rum, loading the boat with empty bottles before he left Auckland, buying 100-litre kegs in Tahiti and filling them. "It was pretty raw and strong and we put half an inch of vanilla bean in it to take away the harshness. We flogged it through the islands. It used to pay for our cruises."

Debbie Lewis, the boat's second-most-famous owner, bought the *Ngataki* in 1988, in Picton. She had not sailed beyond New Zealand waters, or even sailed much at all. Debbie knew nothing of boats, nor of the *Ngataki*. She wanted to sail to the Islands and the boat felt right. "A friend came up from Christchurch and we went below and sat on the couches and before we knew it we'd been there all afternoon." Essentially she remained true to Johnny Wray's style: she loaded up the boat with food, stores and her eleven-year-old son, Jason, and left. And ended up sailing for seven years around the world. Along the way she discovered the boat's history. It made her nervous. "The more I got to know about her, the more I realised I couldn't actually bugger up. It's not nice to lose any boat, but a production boat, you can go to the factory and get another one of those. You could not get another one of *Ngataki*."

That singularity was her dilemma when she returned in 1994. The *Ngataki* was deteriorating. After fifteen years living aboard, Debbie bought a house. A storm broke the old ship's moorings and she washed up on the beach, and once, as she struggled to save *Ngataki*, Debbie thought she was gone. Her strong construction protected her, but the warning was clear. Debbie decided the old boat needed a good home. The Tino Rawa Trust, dedicated to preserving historical yachts and launches, provided the answer. Debbie gave the boat to the Trust and the Trust restored her, a solid, blocky boat among their graceful old keelers.

Boat-builder Marco Scuderi painstakingly rebuilt her hull, by then a massive task: in the years out of the water, she had shrunk. Many of Johnny's number eight wire fastenings survived. Marco put 2500 new silicone bronze screws in the hull, repaired planking and the ship's bones, and rebuilt her vanished bulwarks. It was a massive job, but the *Ngataki* is at last as good as new and ready for a second lifetime.

Tony Stevenson, Tino Rawa trustee, felt the weight of her history on his shoulders, the critical gaze of Johnny Wray's followers on the Trust's work, and the *expense*. "Eight pounds ten shillings," he mused. "Even with cost of-living increases we're well beyond that."

South Sea Vagabonds inspired generations throughout Johnny's century

and into the next. This new edition of *South Sea Vagabonds* marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of its first publication in 1939. Further editions followed in 1941, 1952, 1953, 1977 and 1988. Foreign editions have been published in other languages, including Portuguese and Dutch, and Ben Bongers, who lives in the Netherlands, found something intriguing about the Dutch version: it contained two more chapters than earlier English editions. One told the story of a delivery voyage which ended in shipwreck near Ahipara, the other a Friendly Isles adventure in which first, Johnny worked as a pest exterminator in ships and almost killed three people, and second, did a little whaling. All editions carried the foreword by Sir Ernest Davis, the brewery baron, businessman, former mayor of Auckland and inveterate sailor, whose yacht *Moerewa* sometimes had Johnny Wray at the helm. One of Sir Ernest's gifts to the nation was Motukorea, or Browns Island, which lay alongside Johnny's route to the city.

South Sea Vagabonds fed intravenously into New Zealanders' self-image: courage, perseverance, ingenuity, right down to the number eight wire. Seventy-five years on it speaks to a far wider audience, not only of sailors and dreamers, but people who just love a good story.

BRUCE ANSLEY, 2014

Foreward

by the Mayor of Auckland
Sir Ernest Davis

Man's never-ending struggle with Nature finds expression in devious ways, but in none, perhaps, more vividly than his attempted mastery of the sea. For that reason, if for no other, the present volume will be welcomed. But the author - a sailorman in every sense of the word - has produced something distinctively superior to a mere autobiographical record of trans oceanic cruises in a small craft constructed from assembled driftwood. He has written in direct language, with due regard to light and shade and a nice appreciation of the dramatic, a living story of almost unbelievable experiences in calms and storms, fair winds and foul, demonstrating again that truth may be stranger even than fiction; that the application of endurance, resource and determination will overcome difficulties before which the hearts of most would quail; and that the spirit of hardihood and pluck which brought the pioneers to our country more than a century ago lives on to-day.

It is, of course, one thing to triumph over almost insuperable odds, another to present a vibrant, absorbing account of the conquest without sacrificing the facts on the altar of effect. In each Mr. Wray has succeeded and, at the same time, he has made to the literature of the sea a contribution which appeals to me as being of outstanding merit and force.

For over fifty years an active yachtsman, I have followed with keenest interest the adventurous voyages of John Wray, and have been eagerly awaiting the publication of them in permanent form. Readers will find for themselves that the author is a real son of the sea, worthily saluting its highest traditions.

ERNEST DAVIS, 1939
Mayor of Auckland, New Zealand.

Contents

Introduction (from 2016 edition)
Foreward
List of Illustrations
Preface

I. The Idea
II. I Begin
III. I Try Again
IV. The Building of the Ship
V. The Launching

VI. Preparation for a Cruise
VII. An Ocean Cruise
VIII. The Islands
IX. The Trans-Tasman Race
X. Hobart

XI. Race to New Zealand
XII. An Attempt at Island Trading
XIII. A Crusie to Tahiti
XIV. In a Hurricane
XV. A Solo Ocean Trip

Conclusion
Photo Insert (from 2016 edition)

Illustrations

The Early Stages
Looking Forward
Looking Aft
Lifting Planks Into Position
The Planking Creeps Up
The Planking Finished

Ngataki Under Construction
In The Front Garden At Home

Ngataki at the Start of the Tasman Race
The Crew of the *Ngataki*
Ngataki Running Before a Gale

In the Storm off the Tasman Coast

Ngataki at Hobart
Leaving Auckland for Tonga
Across Ball Bay, Norfolk Island

Copper-Sheathing *Ngataki*

A Feast At Papeete
A Typical Tahitian Scene
Approaching Murea
Ngataki at Murea

In the Trade Winds
Sunset Before a Hurricane

"The Mansions," Sunday Island
Bruce Robinson on Sunday Island
Sailing with Tiller Pegged

Preface

I am not a writer. Never was and never will be. I remember distinctly that my form master at school used invariably to describe my attempts at essays as: "Conglomerations of facts occasioned by heterogeneous concatenations of stupid irrelevancies." And I don't know that I have improved much since then.

But this book is written primarily for dreamers, and they don't mind if a man can write or not as long as the facts are there. It is written for the man who works in a city office and dreams about sparkling blue waters and coconut palms and white sails bellying to the warm trade winds. It will, perhaps, show him how it is possible to break away from the ties of civilization, build himself a boat and sail in her wherever he wills. I was a dreamer once, but now my dreams have come true, and I am satisfied and happy.

J.W. WRAY

Yacht "Ngataki",
Vavau, Friendly Isles

CHAPTER I

The Idea

"The Chief wants to see you, Wray."

I started guiltily and hastily pushed a drawing of a boat, on which I had been concentrating for the last half hour, underneath a convenient ledger.

The summons, coming from such a high quarter, did not sound too good to a man with a guilcy conscience and I made my way to the Chief's room with feelings of misgiving.

I realized I had been asking for the sack for some time and this looked uncommonly like it. If it was, what should I do? Times were hard and jobs were scarce. Well, I soliloquized as I made my way there, this job did not suit me anyway-more or less a waste of time. It was monotonous work and a change would not do me any harm.

"Good morning, Wray."

"Good morning, sir."

"Sit down, Wray. Um-ah-I am afraid I have rather an unpleasant duty to perform, Wray." (So it *was* the sack.) "The commissioner has informed me that, owing to the financial depression, he regrets he will have to dispense with your services as from the end of the month."

Perhaps I ought to have clutched my forehead and recoiled with an expression of mingled surprise and horror, but (it being my intention in this narrative to stick strictly to facts) I am afraid I merely grinned. Rather a weak grin, I admit, for it is not exactly an achievement to get the sack, but nevertheless it was a grin. However, it did not seem to improve the situation much. He went on to say how sorry he was, how the department had to cut down expenses, etc., etc.

The interview finished. The deed was done. With mixed feelings I made my way back to my room, where the others were waiting to hear the results of my visit.

"Well," said one, "what did he want you for?"

"I've got the sack!"

"The sack?"

"The sack, no less."

A sympathetic murmur went round the room and I assumed an injured and dejected air.

"Anyway," I said at length. "why not?"

"Put like that," grinned Ralph, "why not? You are certainly not much good to the department."

I froze him with a stare. "What I meant was, for the last four years now I've been working here and -"

"Working, did you say?" he inquired. "That's rather a loose way of describing it."

"Well, anyway, I've been attending the office now for over four years and I'm no further ahead now than when I started. I'm just about holding my own here and I think it's time I had a change."

"You'll get a change now all right. Got any idea of what you're going to do?"

"Well - er - no. Not at the moment, but something's bound to turn up."

There was a fortnight to go to the end of the month. When a week had passed I was still undecided as to what I was going to do. I had scouted round the town a bit - in office hours - but suitable jobs seemed scarce.

However, I did not let the situation worry me unduly. I was young - barely twenty-one - and this looked like a golden opportunity to break away for a while from the sordid atmosphere of a city office. Towards the end of the week I thought more and more of the ambition I had cherished for many years: to go cruising around the tropical islands of the South Pacific in my own ship. Ever since starting work in the city I had dreamt of palm-clad atolls and white sails bellying to the warm trade winds. That is probably why I got the sack; too much thought to enchanting tropical islands and not enough to my work.

But then my dreams could not come true, for, like so many other young men, I was tied to my job. Now there was a slightly better chance. At the end of the week l would have, if nothing else, plenty of leisure. But to go cruising on the ocean, one must have more than just leisure. For the best results a good cruising boat, or the wherewithal to buy one, is a necessity.

That was one of the minor catches to the fulfilment of my dream. I had no boat and my total assets at the end of the month would be £8 10s. in cash and an old motor bike which I valued at £10, but which the second-hand dealers valued at £3. Altogether not a very bright prospect.

That evening a friend of mine, Walter by name, visited me and I confided my troubles in him; as the proud owner of a little auxiliary yacht he offered a sympathetic ear to my troubles.

"Yes," he mused, "I don't see how you are going to buy a comfortable, seaworthy cruiser for £8 10s."

We stared for a while at the flickering flames in the fireplace.

"Let's attack the problem methodically," he went on, "First you want to go ocean cruising. For that you require a boat. You must have a boat. There are, let me see, four five-six ways of acquiring a suitable boat. You can buy one; you can be given one; you can build one; you can beg, borrow, or steal one.

Now, let's take them in order; You can't buy one-not with £8 10s.- so I think we can rule that out. You don't know anyone likely to give you one?"

"I'm afraid not," I grinned. "You can count that out."

"Well, what about building one? You once made a canoe out of a sheet of roofing iron, don't forget that. I think you ought to build one."

"You'll have to guess again. I don't know one end of a saw from the other."

"You could soon learn, you've got plenty of time now."

"Maybe; but anyway, you want money for that. You want a workshop and tools and timber and bolts and nails and - oh - hundreds of things. There's no show there; pass on to the next method."

"Can't you beg one from somebody? Don't you know any rich people?"

"No."

"What about borrowing one?"

"I don't think anyone would be mug enough to lend me one. Anyway, I wouldn't go in someone else's boat. Might wreck it. No, it must be my own boat."

"Well, what about pinching one?"

"That sounds as good as any."

"It would be quite easy. Just find a nice boat and one dark night sail away in her. Simple."

"But they might send a gunboat after me, and if there is anything I dislike intensely, it is being shot at."

"Oh, you would probably get away all right - if you sailed fast enough."

"Then they would be waiting for me with a nice big Black Maria at the other end. No, Walter, that would be rather too exciting for my delicate constitution. Besides, think of the load it would be on the Wray conscience."

"Well, if that's the case, Johnny, I don't see how you're going to get a boat then. Personally, I think you ought to build one. It's your only chance. You've plenty of time and there's no hurry. A month ago I was passing Tiri Island and I saw three or four big kauri logs washed up on the beach there. I should think there would be a fair bit of timber in them. You may find some more somewhere else, if you look, then you would have some timber at any rate. You could have a loan of my boat to tow the logs into Auckland, if you like. How about that for an idea?"

"There may be something to it. On Tiri Island, you say the logs were? I wonder how much timber there would be in them? Do you think I could get them into Auckland?"

"I should think so. I didn't go very close to them, but from a distance they looked all right. Anyway there would be no harm in having a look at them."

"But even if! got some timber I wouldn't know what to do with it. I've got no more idea of how to go about building a boat than the man in the moon."

"You could learn. Go round to the boat-building firms and say you're thinking of getting a boat built. Watch them at work and you'll soon see how

it's done. Go round to all the shipyards and in a couple of days you'll be an accomplished boat-builder."

"Oh, yes?"

The next day I took my first official interest in boat building. I visited a yard - in office hours - where they were at work on the construction of a 35-foot cruiser. It certainly looked fairly simple the way *they* did it. Lay down the keel and build up the stem and sternpost; bolt on a few frames and bung on the planking. The result is a serviceable looking cruiser. Simple.

The work was proceeding rapidly. The planks seemed to be just asking to be put in place. A man would open the steam-box and be immediately enveloped in a cloud of steam. A little profanity as he burnt himself, and the plank would be rushed over to the ship where it would be bent round nicely into place. It would be clamped into position and the boys would start riveting it.

Everybody seemed to be happy and contented in their work. They had good reason to be, for they were creating something; something which was useful and, in their opinion, beautiful. The man who is creating something seems to be invariably happy. The blacksmith is happy when he creates something useful from a bit of old iron; the artist lingers over his picture; the carpenter whistles as he works; and the boat-builder stands off and gazes with pride at the lines of his latest ship. But show me the man who is enjoying himself adding up dead figures, or looking after dusty ledgers.

As I stood there watching the men carefully fitting in the planks, the boys whistling and cheerfully making as much noise as possible riveting, I decided there and then I would at least try to build a boat.

I returned to the office and surreptitiously crept in, trying, as usual after a lengthy guilty absence, to assume the air of one who has just returned from the filing room. I was soon poring over a ledger again, but my mind was on a graceful ship that was steadily growing in a shop amid a happy and contented atmosphere. She had the beautiful lines of the true dream-ship. A deep forefoot, yet not too deep, just about the right beam ...

"Have you finished that lot yet, Wray? They are wanted in a hurry. And here's some more to go on with afterwards."

The picture of the boat-building shop faded a little as I attacked the columns of figures, but it never left me. I resolved that every day I would visit the place and see how the work was proceeding. And this I did.

During the next few days I was not what you might call very popular at home. Sons who are about to lose their jobs seldom are. But my people had accepted the situation in the right spirit-at any rate, from my point of view.

"Build a boat?" My mother had said. "But, John, you don't know how. You've never done anything in that line before. Whereabouts were you thinking of building it?"

"Well - er - I had thought of doing it on the front lawn. Do you think that would be all right? What do you think, Dad?"

"It's going to make a deuce of a mess and it'll completely ruin the look of the place. But if you've got nothing else to do, and you want to build a boat, I suppose we'll have to put up with it."

After this I definitely made up my mind. I would give it a go. I had nothing to lose by it. I had a site for my operations now; a good, convenient site that would enable me to use the electricity from the house to work at night.

Saturday at last arrived, the end of the month and my last day at the office. Glad as I was to be finished with monotony, I found there were a number of good friends in the office from whom I was sorry to part. I said good bye to them and with mixed feelings made my way home. Well, that was that.

CHAPTER II

I Begin

That afternoon Walter and I left in his 22-foot auxiliary, the *Wainui*, for a week-end cruise to Tiri to inspect "our" kauri logs. Tiri is a small island only about 20 miles from Auckland and about six o'clock that evening we arrived and anchored off the lee side.

The next day we made a tour of inspection. There were some good logs there all right, seven altogether. Three big ones, about 25 feet long and 30 inches through, and four smaller ones. There ought, we decided, to be good timber at least in the larger logs. There seemed to be a faint outline of a brand on the end of each, but they were too old and weathered to be able to distinguish anything clearly.

"What if I go to the trouble of taking these logs back to Auckland and then someone claims them says it's their brand?" I asked. "I should look a bit silly, shouldn't I?"

"Oh, I dunno, I don't think anybody is likely to claim them. If they had wanted them, they would have got them themselves. They've probably forgotten all about them by now. They look as though they have been here for ten years at least, judging by their condition."

"Well, we may as well give it a go. But they'll take a lot of getting into the water. They look pretty heavy."

"Bring some long bits of timber with you and you ought to be able to lever them down to the water all right. If I could get a few days off, I would come and give you a hand, but I'm afraid I can't. We're pretty busy just now."

So it was decided that I should come and get the logs, tow them into Auckland and get them cut up.

We returned to the boat and did a little fishing. There are some good fishing grounds around Tiri and inside an hour we had thirty-two good snapper on board. We salted them down and set sail for Auckland.

The next day I visited a friend of mine who works in the Harbour Board and is consequently an authority on nautical matters.

"I say, Arthur, do any of these timber firms ever lose any logs when they're towing a raft into Auckland?"

"Occasionally, not so much now, for we make it pretty hot for them if their logs break adrift. They're a menace to shipping and, if a boat hits a

drifting log, the firm whose brand is on the log is responsible for any damage done. So that they look after their logs pretty well now. But in the past a few have broken away. You can see them half buried in beaches round the coast."

"We saw some good kauri baulks on Tiri during the week-end. I was thinking of towing them in and building a bit of a boat out of them. I got the sack last week," I added by way of explanation.

"The sack, eh? Tough luck! So you're going to build a boat? Not a bad idea. But kauri logs, you say? I don't think you'll find any kauri left round Auckland."

"Well, we saw some on Tiri all right."

"Well, if they are kauri, there'll be some good timber in them. Kauri lasts just about indefinitely. There are plenty of boats here built of kauri that are over sixty years old."

"But if I bring them in do you think any of the firms will try to claim them? They look as if they've had a brand on them at some time or another."

"I don't think you need worry about that," he grinned. "They've been caught like that before. A couple of years ago I showed a timber firm a log and they said yes, it was theirs all right. I told them one of our boats had hit it and had been sunk and there was £380 to pay on it. They weren't so keen on claiming it then. But their brand was on it and they couldn't get out of it. I don't think they will want to claim any more logs."

That sounded all right. All that remained to be done, then, was to bring the logs in, get them cut up and build a boat out of them. Simple.

Two days later I again set sail for Tiri in the *Wainui*. I carried some lengths of rope for towing, a number of pieces of stout timber for levers and enough food and water for a week. In the tank were a couple of gallons of petrol, sufficient for about six hours steaming with the engine. But I was relying mostly on the sails for towing. I could not afford to buy petrol: I would want all of my money for building expenses.

The first day's work resulted in three of the smaller logs being levered into the water. Those which remained were rather awkwardly placed, among rocks, and had to be levered inch by inch over each obstruction. It was hard work all right. Another two days and two more logs were made fast behind the boat. This left only two more, the two largest and best. Hours of work on these, however, proved fruitless. I could not move them. I had almost decided to return and try to borrow a timber jack or something, when help, in the shape of four fishermen, appeared round a bend in the rocks.

"Say, mate, could you sell us about four gallons of benzene or kerosene? We're off the fishing boat, the *Alice G.*, just around the corner there. The *Peerless's* engine has broken down and we're towing her into port, but we've run out of gas.

"What about the *Peerless*? Can't you get some off her?"

"She's another fishing boat, same size as ours, but she's Diesel."

"I'm sorry," I replied, "I've got only about two gallons and I' ll want all of

that if I'm going to tow these logs into Auckland."

"Are you going to tow these logs in?"

"Yes."

"What! In that boat?"

"Sure, why not?"

"She must have a pretty powerful engine."

"Well, the makers once credited it with three-and-a half horse-power. I think it's still about one-and-a-half horse-power, or maybe it's two."

"Well, you've got a hide. When are you going?"

"As soon as I can get these two logs into the water. I'll tell you what. You give me a hand and I'll tow you up, too. The weather's fine and settled; it'll take some time but we'll make it."

It was their only chance of getting into port and they accepted the offer. With the increased man-power we had no trouble getting the remaining two logs into the water.

Towards evening the seven logs were securely fastened to the *Wainui*, streamed out on a long rope to facilitate towing. Then we began to steam round the corner of the island to pick up the other two boats. The engine chugged along all right but it was painfully slow and I doubt if we did half a knot.

I rounded the point - and got a bit of a shock. At a first glance, the horizon seemed to be dotted with boats, dozens of them. Another glance reduced their number to six; two 60-feet fishing boats, each having two heavy punts to assist in the fishing.

Well, I couldn't very well get out of it. The weather was fine, with a very light fair wind. Theoretically it is true that a boat however small can tow a boat however big as long as there are no opposing forces such as wind or tide, so I decided to give it a trial. They tied up behind me and shortly after dark we got under way.

An hour later, having cleared the island by about half a mile, I stopped the engine and trusted to the sails to push us along. Luckily the wind was on the beam, so we could fetch our course without difficulty, but having so little steerage way the rudder was more or less useless. The wind remained light but steady and, as the *Wainui* looked after herself pretty well, I went below for a few hours sleep.

The next morning found us about eight miles from the island. We had made as much leeway as headway during the night, but still we were a little closer to Auckland. I looked at the two comparatively big boats behind me and felt quite proud of the efforts of my little boat in towing them along. I even had visions of pictures of our arrival appearing in the papers. I brushed back my hair and grabbed the tiller with a businesslike air as if posing for a picture.

I took a bearing on the distant shore and an hour later took another to find what headway we were making. I found we were going backwards!

Apparently the tide set against us on the ebb. I handed the sails and dropped the anchor, having to use most of my tow rope as well as the anchor warp, for it was very deep. When the anchor got a grip on the bottom, I found there was a good half-knot tide against us.

I had breakfast and rowed over to the *Alice G.*, where we spent the morning playing cards and talking boats until the tide turned. The wind had now died completely away, leaving an oily calm. I pulled up the anchor and we began to drift towards Auckland. The logs went first, then the fishing boats, and the *Wainui* came last, all drifting together. We did not look quite so elegant now and I did not feel quite so proud, but, by bearings on shore, we were going at a good half-knot towards Auckland.

That night we carried on, anchoring when the tide was falling and drifting in on the flood. About midnight I awoke from a short sleep. I looked behind and was surprised to see the lights of a third boat tied behind the other two. This was getting a bit too much of a joke. I got into the dinghy and rowed over intending to enter a mild protest. But I found they were friends of the fishermen who had seen them passing and had signalled them. When I arrived they were busy transferring petrol to the *Alice G.* A few minutes later all three boats cast off their lines and got under way. The *Alice G.*, towing the *Peerless*, passed me and shouted a cheery good-bye accompanied by a number of good humoured, sarcastic remarks about towing in general and my boat in particular.

The following afternoon I made the entrance to Auckland harbour. Just inside the entrance, out of the way of shipping, I anchored the three larger logs, leaving the four smaller ones tied behind me. I did not want to be handicapped too much, for I was getting into busy waters. I wanted a little speed in order to get out of the way of launches, ferry-boats and 20,000-ton liners if the occasion warranted. With only the four small logs I could do one knot, which ought to keep me out of harm's way.

Late that evening, having successfully dodged two ferry-boats, I arrived near the mill and promptly got stuck on the mud. The following morning I floated clear and sailed back for the remaining three logs. There was a light head wind, and it was not till the afternoon that I reached the harbour entrance./

The logs were not where I had left them! I looked all round where they might be, in fact spent several hours looking for them, but there was no sign of them anywhere. I decided they must have dragged their anchor. With the incoming tide they were probably now drifting in among the many ferry-boats of the harbour. Panic assailed me at this thought and I hurriedly turned back prepared for the worst.

Goggle-eyed I watched the ferry-boats packed with passengers bustling to and fro across the harbour. If one of them hit my logs, it would probably sink and then -

I was soon amongst the shipping again, dodging here and there and

keeping an anxious eye open for the three long low shapes in the water. But there was no sign of them. Evening came, then night. The wind dropped away with the sun and I was forced to use the engine again. Still there was no sign of the logs.

I was off the main wharves again when I heard three blasts of a steamer's whistle. A large tramp was backing out from the wharf. She was floating fairly light and by the glare of the wharf lights I could see the big screw churning the water into foam. I was carrying no lights and she looked like coming uncomfortably close to me, so I altered course to avoid her. At that moment the engine stopped. It did not take me long to diagnose that I had run out of petrol. In the excitement of the hunt, I had forgotten all about my limited fuel supply.

The steamer was backing straight at me and the huge thudding propeller was now altogether too close for my liking. I scrambled below and tried to find a light of some sort but could not find even a match.

It was nearly on top of me now. In the semi-darkness I could see the huge blades revolving, emerging from the water and crashing into it again with a reverberating roar that emphasized the power behind them. If the *Wainui* got mixed up in that turmoil, there would be only small pieces of matchwood left of her. I yelled myself hoarse and grabbed a bit of wood and tried to paddle away to one side.

Then the propeller stopped. I don't know now whether they saw me, or whether they had reversed far enough, but it stopped. The huge, black shape towered over me. The screw glided silently past a few feet away. *Wainui's* mast caught on the stern of the steamer and she heeled over alarmingly. A shroud snapped and then with a crash that nearly threw me off my feet the steamer hit us. I pushed against her sides for all I was worth: the propeller started revolving again. The steamer slowed down and began to forge ahead. Roaring and thudding, the screw pounded past again, making a terrible commotion as it threw the water high into the air. But this time it was a few yards off. I watched it pass, hypnotized by the terrible strength of it all.

I was badly shaken by the narrow escape. I had had quite enough log-hunting for one night and with the help of the tide I paddled away to a safe anchorage.

The next morning, on getting hold of the morning paper, I was relieved to find there were no glaring headlines of the "Terrible Calamity-Boat Hits Drifting Logs" order. There was not even any mention of my logs. They had just disappeared and it would be very little use to go on looking for them. They had probably drifted miles away on the two-knot tide.

Nevertheless, their disappearance rankled and at about noon, happening to be near a telephone, I thought I would ring up and make a few discreet enquiries. It seemed no one had seen them, until I rang up the Harbour Board. They had seen them where I had anchored them. It was against Regulations to anchor anything there and they had towed them to their slip. If I went round

there, I might have them; there would be £1 to pay on them for towage.

So that's what had happened to them! I went and collected them and paid my £1, leaving only £7 10s. to complete my ship. Fortunately the mill was not far away and I soon had all seven logs tied near it. Then I went to see the manager.

"Well, I've brought those kauri logs in I was talking to you about the other day."

"What? Oh yes. All right. It'll cost you 8s. a hundred to get them cut up. Where are they?"

"Tied up down there."

"I'll come down and have a look at them."

As we walked down, I told him of my tow in and of my plans for building a boat. Diplomatically, I praised the layout of his mill, for a mill-manager is a handy friend, if one is building a boat.

"There they are," I said proudly. "There'll be some good timber in them, won't there?"

"Where?"

"There."

"What, those?"

"Yes. Pretty good line, eh?"

"They're no damn good. They're not kauri. They're old pine *pinus insignis* no good for anything but butter boxes."

My heart dropped right into my shoes. "Not kauri?" I stammered. "Not kauri! And I have worked myself silly for the last few days bringing them in."

"I'll tell you what," said the manager. "I'll give you 4s. 6p. a hundred for them, if you like; or else I'll keep them and, if you bring in seven kauri logs, about that size, I'll cut them up for nothing for you. But don't go bringing any more of these in."

Very decently he went on to show me the difference between kauri and other wood, so that I would not make any more mistakes.

I left the logs, and my regrets, with him, and with a heavy heart made my way back to the Royal Akarana Yacht Club, off which I moored the *Wainui*. For the last few days I had had visions of lorry loads of good timber arriving home and a ship beginning to take shape. But now that picture had quickly faded. There's always a catch somewhere.

CHAPTER III

I Try Again

That evening I told Walter my troubles. "Well," he said at length, "if my boat's any good to you, you can take it and go out and look for some kauri. Go for a bit of a cruise round the coast and keep your eyes open. You've got plenty of time. There's bound to be some kauri somewhere."

It was very good of him and I took advantage of his offer. Anyway, there are lots of worse ways of spending one's time than cruising round a beautiful coast.

A week later I found myself near a small island, on which there was the wreck of a large four-masted barque, the *Rewa*. With all her masts and spars still standing, she was lying across the mouth of a little bay, forming a breakwater.

I went past her and anchored for the night in the cosy little anchorage, inside her. I went ashore. There was a man there, Charlie Hanson, who had bought the *Rewa* as she stood, with all gear, ropes, sails, everything complete. Charlie was mad as was I on boats and with this in common we were soon fast friends.

To anyone nautically minded his little home was a perfect delight. It was built largely from gear salvaged from the ship "in his front garden", as he called it. Lifebelts, binnacles, wheels; flags, shrouds, ropes, rails; in fact, everything dear to the heart of a sailor was built into that little home. There was a library there that must have contained every nautical book ever published, a library that would be the heart's desire of any true sea-lover. A perfect home for an old sailor.

I stayed long into the night, surrounded by books. Charlie went to bed and some hours later I rolled over and went to sleep with the "Mutiny on the Bounty" in my hand.

"Come on there! Show a leg! Show a leg, there, Johnny! Time to get up."

I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and beheld Charlie, naked and dripping wet, coming in from his morning swim. Charlie, in spite of his seventy-four years, was as fit as a fiddle, and nothing would keep him from his morning plunge.

By now, of course, he knew all about my boat building plans and over breakfast we discussed them.

"I've got enough gear off her," said Charlie, waving his arms at the tall masts and spars visible through the window, "to sink any boat you're likely to build. I'll help you as much as I can. I'd like to give you all the gear you want, but I'm a poor man. But I'll tell you what - you bring me down a little food, a bag of flour, a bag of potatoes and a few other things, and I will let you have all the gear you want to fit out - rigging, ropes and canvas."

I gladly accepted his offer, for the rigging of my boat had already given me something to think about. You can't cut a sail out of a log. It was a step in the right direction, anyway. If I ever did finish the ship, I would be able to rig her and fit her out with sails.

The rest of the day was spent in climbing over the *Rewa*, and the next morning I bade *au revoir* to Charlie and continued my search for logs.

At the end of a fortnight's cruising I had located three kauri logs. One was 27 feet long and 30 inches through and there were two smaller ones. They were all practically buried in shingle and were well seasoned without too many cracks. In the big one, at any rate, there would be some excellent timber.

I marked the places where they lay, as the shingle was continually shifting and it was probable that the next time I called they would be totally buried.

Returning to town, I began to scour round for a boatload of food to take to Charlie; there was no harm in having the rigging to start off with and it could hang around the place to encourage me.

In the evening I began work on the model. I knew just as much about boat-designing as I did about boat building. It is said that a little learning is a dangerous thing and I proved the truth of this old saw in the hard school of experience. I found that with no knowledge at all you can get along all right. You can attack all problems from first principles, which are seldom wrong.

The simplest way for me to design a boat, then, was to build a scale model, shape it till it looked all right, then cut it up and get the shape of each section; enlarge the section up to full size, build a frame to this size, and this would be a frame of the ship. It seemed fundamentally sound and so I started off on the model.

A year or two previously I had sailed a little with Earling Tambs in his ill-fated *Teddy*. Even had I not already known of the wonderful reputation of these Norwegian pilot boats for seaworthiness, the *Teddy's* graceful lines would have told me that here was a boat to be copied - if possible.

But I would not be able to bend ribs that would be sufficiently heavy for my liking and so my boat would have to be straight-sided, in other words, square-bilged. Then I could put in as many heavy ribs as I liked. Again, the planking round the *Teddy's* double-ended stem looked far too complicated for me to copy, so I decided on a square, transom stern.

The next problem was the question of the size of my ship. This would largely depend on how much timber I could lay hold of. Given sufficient timber, I determined to make it about 35 feet in length with a beam of 12 feet.

Accordingly I obtained a lump of kauri 35 inches long, 7 inches wide and 10 inches deep, and set to work on the half-model, using first a saw, then a hammer and chisel, then a plane and finally a scraper. The tools. by the way, were borrowed from my father. He was a moderately good craftsman and was, naturally enough, not very keen on lending me tools, knowing just how much I knew about looking after them. However, as I pointed out, I could not harm them much on a plain bit of wood without nails or bolts in it.

At the end of a week I was still scraping off fine shavings. A week does sound a long time to work on one piece of wood; it was, and when the seventh day had elapsed, it seemed I had been living with that model all my life.

Every night Walter and one or two other nautical friends would look in. We would put the half-model against the mirror, look at it from all angles, discuss boats in general and this one in particular.

My primary demands were that my boat should be seaworthy and roomy, with speed as a secondary consideration, although, of course, I wanted it to be as fast as a wide beam, heavy displacement and comparatively short length would allow. Above all things, it had to be a boat that I could build. It would have been of little use to have built a model with plenty of graceful curves, for the same graceful curves would have completely beaten me when it came to cutting frames and bending planks. However, a nice sheer line and sensible deck plan is not hard to build, and my model, to my mind, had them. I made a number of little model planks, about an eighth of an inch thick, and bent them round the model. When they bent round smoothly everywhere, then, I argued, the planks on the big boat ought to bend round smoothly also.

On the tenth day I was still scraping off thin microscopic shavings here and there. Every now and again there would be an hour or so's deliberation and thought, then another thin shaving would come off.

That night we were in conference as usual.

"I don't see any difference from last night," said Bob.

"Oh, yes. I took a shade off the quarter there; it looked a bit full but I think it's all right now. Do you think I ought to take a shade more off the forefoot?"

"No, I think that's all right. I would have a fairly deep forefoot. It will make the boat more stable, especially in a seaway. Of course, she'll be a bit slower in stays, but that won't matter except in crowded anchorages."

"I was reading an article in *Yachting* the other day," said Walter, "and the chap there was all for a deep forefoot at sea. The *Teddy's* was pretty deep, wasn't it?"

"Yes, she's about the same as the *Teddy* now, I think."

"Well, that ought to be all right. Look here, Johnny, you've been mucking about with that model for weeks, probably been sleeping with it. And it looks as though you're going fiddling about for a good many more weeks. She's all right now. Call it a day, and carry on with the boat proper. You can't improve on the model now. For the type of boat she is, she looks pretty good to me. If you carry on much longer, there'll be nothing left of her."

"AII right. Well, gentlemen, this is the model. All I've got to do now is build the real boat."

My ship was designed.

"By the way, Walter," I added a little later, "you haven't got any old hammers, saws, planes, or anything like that round your place, have you? I haven't got any tools yet and for the best results you really need a few when you're boat-building."

"I've got a saw and a hammer. That's about all I've got, but I'll have a scout-round and see what I can find."

Then Bob, bless him, spoke: "I've got plenty of tools at home, Johnny. Saws, planes, chisels, drills and quite a lot of other things. Let me know what you want and I'll bring them down next time I come."?

My friends did not fail me. Bob brought down a grand selection and, when other yachting friends knew what was wanted, they all rallied round. One would arrive bringing with him a brace and bits; another would turn up with a couple of clamps and so on. "I saw them lying around and thought they might be of use to you, so I brought them along." Which was, I thought, the right spirit.

In this way I gradually collected a remarkable assortment of tools.

In a few days I set off again for Charlie's. This time the little *Wainui* had no sails, for Walter had sent them to the sailmaker for repairs, and so I had to rely on the engine alone. It would mean a few gallons of petrol, but it was worth it if I could ship the rigging from Charlie and tow in the three kauri logs. I had a pretty good load of food in exchange for the rigging: fruit and vegetables gathered from our garden, honey from our hives, home made jams, pickles, and a number of other items, chief of which were a few bottles of my father's home-made beer. Even in those early days of my novitiate I knew that an old sailor without his beer is like corned-beef without cabbage. Another of my precious pounds was spent on flour, butter and kerosene.

With this load I arrived at Charlie's little bay. He was very pleased to get the stuff, for few luxuries ever reached his island home.

The evening was spent in making a list of rigging and running gear we thought would be necessary.

The next morning we began to sort out the gear. He certainly had tons of it. There were three big sheds packed to the roof with it and even then, on the ship, the gear that had been removed could hardly be noticed. But you can imagine the amount of gear that would come off a four-masted barque of 4,000 tons that had recently been in commission.

"There you are, Johnny, for Pete's sake take as much as you can. There's too much of the damed stuff lying around. It's giving me a pain in the neck."

I wish I could quote Charlie's exact words, for being an old sailor his mode of expression could be really picturesque. But his eloquence might not be appreciated in some quarters, and so I must content myself by translating it into more commonplace phraseology.

I took him at his word and quickly amassed a goodly sized heap of assorted gear. But most of the stuff on shore was rather too big for my purpose. You can't have nine 9-inch blocks on a 35-footer, so the next two days were spent in scaling the towering masts of the *Rewa* in search of small blocks and fittings likely to be of use.

Many hours were spent with a hacksaw, sawing off lengths of three-quarter and half-inch galvanized round iron, from which I intended to make bolts. It was good old Swedish iron, and had been weathering the elements for forty years without showing any signs of rust; it looked as though it was good for another forty years.

Charlie gave me one of the *Rewa's* mainsails, a huge mass of canvas that nearly sank the little *Wainui* when he ultimately got it on board. It was 85 feet by 30 feet and I judged there would be enough canvas in it to make two complete suits of sails for my boat. But its weight was enormous and I pictured what it must be like trying to hand that sail in a blow! The men who sailed these ships must be a tough breed.

I spent a pleasant week with Charlie, at the end of which I left with enough gear to rig out my boat two or three times over. Six hours later saw me steaming round Cape Rodney, looking for the little shingle beach where I had left the three kauri logs.

I reached the beach, anchored and went ashore. The logs were soon located and it was only a matter of levering and digging away shingle before I had them in the water. I made sure of them this time. They were kauri, all right.

About 5 p.m., just as it was getting dark, for it was now mid-winter, I got under way on my return trip to Auckland with the three logs in tow. The old engine chugged along very well and we averaged about one knot. About 11 p.m. I was approaching the headland of the Whangaparaoa peninsula. The night was as black as only an overcast moonless night can be, and only a very faint outline of the coast could be seen. It might have been a few hundred yards off or a few miles - it was impossible to tell. There were long reefs coming off the land somewhere about here, and I had no desire to get mixed up in them. I stopped the engine and listened for breakers. There was no call for ear-straining; the roar of breakers was ominously close and I hurriedly dived below to start the engine.

But during the interval complications had set in. The logs had drifted in close when the engine had stopped and the tow lines had fouled the propeller. I prodded the lines frantically with an oar, but they remained obdurate and refused to become disentangled. Heartily I cursed myself for not having foreseen what was bound to happen. The breakers now sounded only a few yards away. There was only one thing to do; I threw off my clothes and with gasping breath slid into the icy waters.

Being totally submerged in freezing waters in the pitch dark is not the best of conditions to unravel ropes that resembled knitting. I was still struggling in

the water when the boat gave a violent heave. I drew myself up a little and looked around. We were almost on top of the breakers! Completely numbed with the cold, I dragged myself on board again, dropped anchor and prepared to ward off. But with a sickening sensation I realized it was too late.

It is remarkable how quickly one thinks in times of emergency. Even as I bent down to grab an oar the probable results of catastrophe flashed through my mind. If I lost this boat it would take me years to save enough to make good the loss to Walter. Years! In which event my chances of ever building a boat for myself would disappear forever.

With a violent, sickening crash, the *Wainui* hit the rocks. To try to ward them off was useless, for, although the sea was not rough, the waves were breaking and there was more weight in them than I had thought. The next sea threw us, grinding, crashing, shuddering, further up the reef. Then the wave receded and the undertow tilted us at an alarming angle towards the sea. A succession of seas poured over us; the *Rewa's* huge mainsail disappeared over the side from off the deck. And then I had an idea.

I jumped into the black, swirling waters and, tugging, gasping and swearing, pulled at the heavy canvas until it stretched along the side of the ship. The next time she came over, the bilge rested on the canvas. As long as I could keep it there, she would not take much harm.

It was my first experience of shipwreck and you can take it from me that on a cold, dark night in mid-winter it is not to be recommended. The incessant noise, the roaring hiss of the waves, and the shuddering thuds that make one think the bottom is about to drop out of the ship, make poor entertainment.

For an hour I was kept busy keeping the canvas underneath the boat. As the tide fell she settled on it and at length the waters left us high, but far from dry. I clambered over the side to inspect the damage. From what I could see, there was luckily very little. A few gashes on the keel, a few small scars on the bilge and that was all. So far, so good. All we had to do now was to float her off on the next tide and everything would be all right.

At dead low water I laid out anchors and ropes enough to kedge her off when we floated again. With all the *Rewa* gear on board there was certainly no shortage of rope.

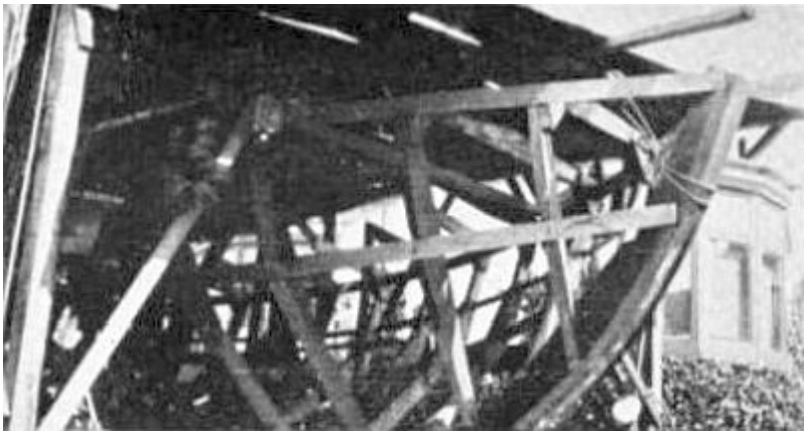
Endless hours dragged by before the water again approached the boat. I spent the time trying to work up a circulation and get warm again, but it was useless. There was nothing warm or even dry on board and so remained wet, cold and numb.

Fortunately the swell seemed to have gone down a bit. Certainly the waves were not so big when they again began to break on the ship. To the accompaniment of more crashes, heaves, and thuds, we floated clear as the first grey light in the east heralded the approach of dawn.

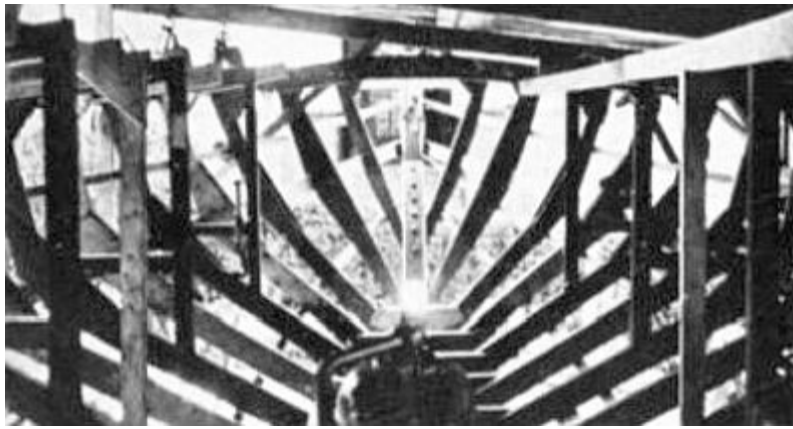
I spent some minutes trying to get *Rewa's* sail on board again, but the huge mass of wet canvas was far too heavy. However, it had been so chafed and torn that it would have been of little use now for sails. I let it go. It had

done its bit. It had saved the *Wainui,* for which I was very thankful. I would still be able to build my boat.

That evening I arrived at the mill with the three logs. The mill cut them up for nothing and I still had a credit balance on account of my other pine logs. There were a magnificent length of 12 inch by 12 inch which would do for the keel, some 12 inch by 8 inch for the stem, more 12 inch by 12 inch for the deadwood, some 12 inch by 4 inch for floor timbers, and some 5 inch by 3 inch, 4 inch by 2 inch, and 5 inch by 2 inch for the ribs.



The Early Stages



Looking Forward

Looking Aft

Lifting The Planks Into Position

The Planking Creeps Up

The Planking Finished

CHAPTER IV

The Building Of The Ship

It was April the 16th, 1932, when this first load of timber arrived at my home. The previous week had been spent in erecting a shed of sorts on the front lawn, as I had to have some protection from the elements. The country-side was scoured for old disused roofing iron and timber and soon I had an astonishing collection.

Anything that resembled timber went into the framework, anything resembling roofing went on the roof and anything that looked like canvas or sacking went round the sides. Eventually there arose a structure of such a heterogeneous conglomeration of materials that it had to be seen to be believed. But at least it kept out most of the rain. It had a wooden floor built of packing cases. This was most necessary as I would have to chalk on it full size drawings of frames as I had seen done in the boat-building yards.

In this weird construction, on April the 18th, levered the 12 inch by 12 inch length, the keel of my ship, into position.

Looking back on it, we definitely should have had some ceremony of celebration, but curiously, for I am a great believer in celebrations, it never occurred to me. At the time the uppermost thought in my mind as I looked at the enormous chunk of timber was whether I would ever build a boat on top of it that would float.

However, I had made a start, I had laid the keel. Now all that remained to be done was to build the boat on top of it.

My first concern was to design the details of the backbone of my ship, the stem, keel, deadwood, and stern. From the model I drew a scale profile of the boat and filled in details that would make a strong job and yet keep within the narrow scope of my ability as a craftsman. Although from the sketch it now looks quite simple, quite a lot of thought went into this drawing, especially as it had to be constructed from the cut sizes of timber at my disposal.

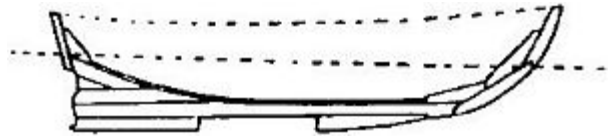


FIG. 1

The first problem in the building up of the backbone was the stem. Here I had my first experience of joining two pieces of wood together. It sounds and looks simple to bolt two pieces of 12 inch by 8 inch wood together, but I found there is more in it than meets the eye. To begin with, they have to fit together EXACTLY. The strength of a boat depends on the close-fitting of its joints and the security of its fastenings. It is useless for the joints to fit well together for three-quarters of their length and be one-sixteenth of an inch apart for the last quarter. And it is always the last quarter that is the hardest.

It was three days before I got my first joint fitting well. Then it had to be bolted together. Again no mean feat, to me, at any rate. I used the three-quarter inch round galvanized iron from the *Rewa* for my bolts, knocking a head on one end and screwing a thread on the other. I countersunk the holes about an inch and a half to allow for a wooden plug to go in over the head of the bolt.

I will not weary you with the details of my first attempts at boat-building. The hours lengthened into days and the days into weeks before I had the stem completed to my satisfaction and joined to the keel.

Next came the deadwood at the stern and the sternpost. This consisted more than anything else of hard work. The heavy pieces of 12 inch by 12 inch were sawn up, squared, and adzed approximately into shape. The memory of my first essays with an adze, by the way, remains ever fresh and vital.

My father owned a much prized and very sharp adze, which he finally consented to lend to me on condition that it be immediately returned to him when I hit the first bolt with it. I had learnt in the boat-building shops that adzing is much quicker than planing for shaping heavy pieces of wood and I saw no reason why I should not try my hand at it.

If you have ever tried, you will have a fair idea of what I mean. The heavy, sharp blade and the weirdly shaped handle seem to have been specially designed to make it the most unwieldy of tools. If such indeed was the purpose, the inventor succeeded admirably, yet there is a queer fascination in using it. After a while one even seems to acquire some semblance of skill in handling it.

But to me there was always the delightful uncertainty as to where the darned thing was going to connect. Occasionally, very occasionally at first, the blade would land in approximately the right place and a goodly sized splinter would fly off. But far more often the wretched thing would land in the wrong place and would be brought prematurely to a shuddering stop as it made a gash in the wood where no gash was required. Then I would alter the

arc a fraction by way of adjustment and this time the weapon would miss the wood altogether and swing viciously at my legs. Since throughout my boat-building operations I wore only shorts and no socks or shoes, I was perpetually and acutely conscious of my adzing activities.

It was said by those privileged to watch me with an adze in the early days that the entertainment compared favourably with that of any of the shows round town at the time. But very few had that privilege; as a general rule, if there were spectators, I stopped adzing and did some other work on the job. I realized that when handling that eccentric tool, with my legs stretched so far apart that I might split in two any moment, and occasionally hopping briskly out of the way as the damned thing missed my shin by inches, I did not look my best.

However, to return to the deadwood. As I say, the pieces of wood were sawn, squared, shaped and then bolted together. That sounds easy. Particularly the last bit, "bolted together". The bolting part of it was not so bad, but the drilling holes nearly drove me crazy.

I had no ship's augers - only brace and short bits and so I could not put the deadwood together and drill a hole through the lot. I had to draw a pencil line where the bolt was going to be, take the deadwood to pieces and drill through each piece separately. Perhaps I should not dwell on so simple a process as drilling a hole, but it entered into this part of the work so much that I find I must say something about it.

The main idea, of course, is to put the hole where you want it. And that's easy. At least half of it is. One end of a hole you can always put where you want. I mean, anyone can put the point of a bit on a mark and start turning the brace. The catch comes at the other end if it is a thick piece of wood. Invariably the bit emerges a little to the left or the right of the mark.

When I started on this work I used to take a series of complicated bearings from the top of the brace on to the wood. This method I found nearly always drilled an erratic hole. Then I changed to one bearing, to keep the brace in line with the mark on the side of the wood, and I found I came a bit nearer the mark. But right to the end it was a matter of considerable uncertainty as to exactly where the point of the bit would appear.

If you watch a professional boat-builder drilling a hole with a long auger, you automatically take it for granted that he will come out where he wants to. He does, and nobody takes any further interest in the hole. Nobody thinks about it. I didn't. It is only when you come to do the work yourself that you realize that there is so much more to it than meets the eye.

In order to complete the deadwood the keelson had to be bolted on top of the keel and deadwood. This was a heavy piece of 16 inch by 2¼ inch. Towards its after end it had to be bent into place. It was not much of a bend, and any normal bit of wood would have bent obligingly and been only too glad to do it. But that keelson stubbornly and persistently refused to bend more than a few inches. I very soon found that brute force was no good. It

became a habit with me on rising in the morning to pour a bucket of boiling water on it and quickly take another turn out of the bolts and clamps before the keelson had recovered from the shock of the hot water. I realize that this was rather an underhand method, but I could think of no other way. Ultimately, however, it gave up the struggle and slowly sank into position.

Three months passed before the deadwood was shaped and bolted to the keel, with the keelson in place. The backbone was complete. And what a backbone! If the rest of the boat was as heavy and strong, she would be some boat!

The next item on the programme was the frames, and here things promised to become a little more complicated. The first thing to do obviously was to design them. The boat was about 35 feet overall and I wanted solid frames at every 2 feet, with two fighter ribs in between each frame. Thus there would be seventeen frames.

To design them I cut up the model and got the shape of each section. Every 2 inches I cut a section squarely off the model, with the result that I ended up with eighteen blocks of wood.

I selected a midship section of the model and measured it as accurately as possible. Each measurement was multiplied by twelve (the scale of the model was an inch to a foot). The resulting full size measurements I chalked on the floor of the shed so that I had a full size complete frame chalked on the floor.

A piece of 12 inches by 4 inches - for a floor timber was then cut to fit the chalk line, then pieces of 5 inches by 3 inches were cut for the bottom timbers, and 4 inches by 3 inches for the side timbers and deck beams. When they all fitted, they were joined together, the joints being of the double-butt variety with a 9 inch by 1 inches cover over them. The complete frame looked like this: -

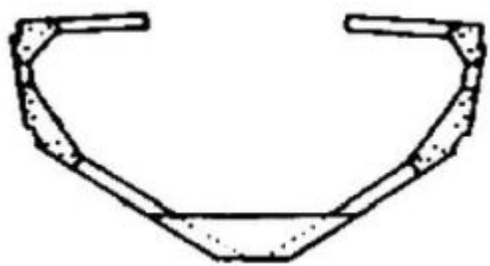


FIG. 2

My next problem was the question of fastening the timbers together and this I accomplished in a manner of which I am rather proud as it has since proved to be absolutely satisfactory. No bolts were used. The timbers were joined with large staple-shaped pieces of heavy fencing wire, which were driven through the wood and the ends hammered over.

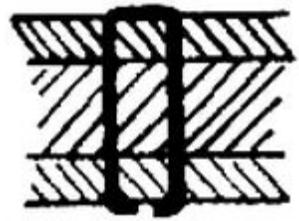


FIG. 3

This method has the advantage over bolts in that the holes are quite small and the wood is not weakened to any extent.

I have to confess, however, that there was another small factor that had something to do with my adopting this method: I had no small bolts, whereas my father had a large coil of heavy fencing wire that he did not want.

But each joint was well tested for strength before I carried on to the next. I took great pains in fastening the staples - or shall we call them clinches? First they were tarred, then baked, and, before driving them in, the holes in the wood through which they would pass, were soaked in whale oil. Altogether, a very sticky business.

I am not sure that I should reveal the process of the tarring and baking of the clinches, but, as I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, I am prepared to chance it.

One dark night you go along the road pushing a wheelbarrow containing a pick. Note: only bitumen roads more or less in the country are suitable. You look for places where the roadmen have been over-liberal and the tar is running into the grass on the side of the road. With the pick you scrape up strips of tar until you have enough and then you wheel it home. The next morning you melt up the night's spoil in a kerosene tin. The tar melts and comes to the top and boils. You dip the clinches in it and hang them up to dry.

One afternoon, when your mother or whoever presides over the household has gone out shopping, you put the clinches in the family gas oven and roast them until they have a hard, enamel-like, black surface. It is advisable to keep a fire-extinguisher or a bucket of water handy, because there is liable to be an explosion, or at least a fire, if you are too liberal with the gas. The result, if you are lucky and have not been gassed, concussed, or burnt, is a good serviceable-looking, black-enamelled clinch.

On an average I made three complete frames a week, so that at the end of another three weeks, I had ten frames ready. I decided it was high time I put some of the frames on the keel and nailed a few battens in position, so that I could see the shape of my ship. So one night, when half a dozen of my friends came round to view the week's progress, we got to work.

The frames were awkward things to handle and it took four of us to lift one into position on the heel, but at length all ten of them were standing and I had tacked a few light battens round to hold them in place.

The result was remarkable. An hour earlier there had been nothing in the

shed but the backbone and an assortment of bits of wood. Now there was, more or less, a complete ship. Two or three months' work seemed to have been done on the ship in the last hour.

Now there was something to show for my labours. Until now I had been working on an idea; now I had something more - a real ship.

It was a great thrill looking at the lines of my ship for the first time. We stood off and gazed at her from all angles. From above, from below, from the bow and from the stern. To me she seemed to have an easy entrance and a good clean run, although she was certainly going to be full-bodied. And what a size! Looking from the bow, the stern seemed to be miles away; and from one side to the other looked at least 20 feet.

But the rule cannot lie. I checked up the dimensions again. She was 34 feet 8 inches overall and 12 feet 4 inches across the widest part of the battens. Allowing for the thickness of the planking and rails, etc., she would be 35 feet by 12 feet 10 inches, quite a fair-sized boat, especially if you are building her yourself.

The next day I did nothing but look and measure my ship. I laid some boards along the floor timbers, to represent floorboards, and I walked backwards and forwards along them. There would certainly be plenty of room below decks. There would be a 12 feet by 8 feet main cabin, an 11 feet by 7 feet for'ard cabin, and an 11 feet by 8 feet galley - big cabins for a thirty-five footer!

I had read a lot about the best place to put the galley. Aft, I thought, was the only place for me. I could imagine myself trying to cook a meal for'ard; the motion of the boat is more violent and there is less fresh air. Although I had no idea how my internal workings would react to a sea-way, I thought I would probably want all the fresh air I could get, if I was going to do any cooking off-shore.

I nailed battens up from the inside of the deck-beams to represent the cabin-sides, and battens across the top of these to represent the cabin-top. I found I would have 6 feet 6 inches headroom in all three cabins. All along I had intended to have a long cabin-top covering the three cabins, yet a fairly narrow one, so that I would have ample deck space. Amidships there was 3 feet 6 inches width of deck on each side of the cabin-house.

Here is the deck plan:

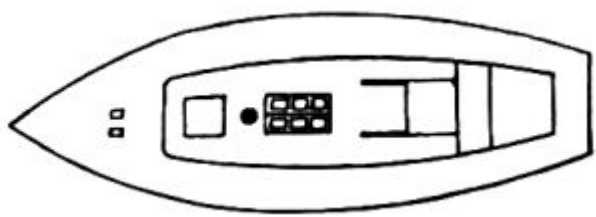


FIG. 4

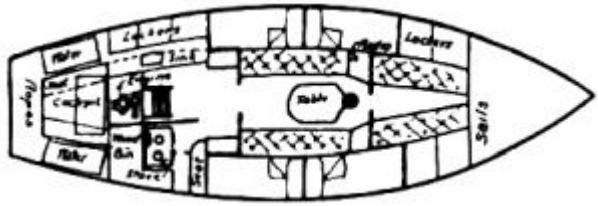


FIG. 5

As I walked round her that morning, I could see my ship completed. The cockpit would be fairly small and watertight. There would be 2 feet of bridge deck under which to put an engine, if I ever got one. There would be plenty of room for a coal stove on one side of the galley and a sink and plenty of cupboards on the other side. I would have four built-in bunks in the main cabin, as the *Teddy* had, with drawers underneath. I would have cupboards there and there, and, if I ever got a radio, I would put it there. The mast would come about here, and I would have the table from here to there, and I would have -

I leaned rather too heavily against one of the frames and the small inch nails holding it pulled out of the light 2 inch by ¼ inch batten. The heavy frame fell and knocked the next frame, which also started to fall. I was dimly aware of frames crashing against frames as I hurriedly jumped to the floor. But it was too late. Above the general noise came a soft swishing as of something rushing through the air; then a sickening thud on my head and a powerful wrench on my neck, as if someone were trying to knock off my head with a battering ram, and-I knew no more for a while.

How long I remained unconscious, I do not know. There was no one home at the time and nobody knew of my position.

The frames had collapsed like a pack of cards and one of them had hit me on the head. When I regained consciousness I found myself lying on the floor of the shed, with a conglomeration of frames, timber and broken battens lying all around me.

What a mess! And what a head I had on me!

I suppose I should have risen and begun to build up the ship again, but I didn't. I lay there for a while and then slowly rose and dragged myself into the house where I lay down on a bed. I had had enough of boat-building for a while.

I don't know if I have a particularly tender head, but it took me a long time to recover from that blow. The next few days were spent, still with a throbbing headache, lying in the sun and trying to cope with the situation. My mother thought I was ill and wanted to send for a doctor, but I said no, I would soon be all right again.

When I at length went and viewed my ship again, or rather the wreck of it, I was definitely disheartened. But the mess was not so bad as it had first looked. I examined the frames and found none of them were injured in any

way. They were all sound and still just the same shape.

The next thing to do was clearly to bolt the frames in position - I did not want any more sudden collapses and thick heads - and the next week or so was spent in fastening them to the backbone. Each frame was bolted with two three-quarter inch bolts to the keel and some heavier battens were fastened round them. She would not collapse a second time.

I found I was short of timber and I would have to postpone further operations until I had replenished my stock.

I will not weary you with details of the many further excursions of the little *Wainui*. Sufficient is it to say that during the next three months I walked round every island and coastline within 70 or 80 miles of Auckland looking for logs. Each time I returned to Auckland, I brought enough pine logs to pay for the trip (for I found firms who would willingly buy them) and generally a few kauri logs for timber. At the end of three months I had enough kauri timber to finish my boat and enough pine logs to pay for the milling of the kauri.

It all sounds very easy -"sail out and bring back enough timber to build a boat" - but it was not quite so simple as it sounds. For one thing the weather was not very conducive to log-towing, or, for that matter, to being at sea at all. It was still winter and the prevailing winds were the hard westerlies of the Roaring Forties. Besides a log can become uncommonly stubborn when it sees that it is about to be pulled from the snug little hole in which it has so peacefully rested for many years. And they simply will not go through the water at any reasonable speed. At times I began to doubt whether the *Queen Mary* could have towed any of my logs through the water at more than two knots. With even the smallest of logs streaming out aft, our progress was as slow as the proverbial snail. But at length I had enough timber and the *Wainui* was hauled up for the remainder of the winter.

At this stage my personal fortune amounted to about £5 in cash and I had determined I would not use this until I absolutely had to. But now I wanted money for nails, spikes and other fastenings.

For a while boat-building operations again ceased, while I toiled in a wool store in Auckland, and it took me three weeks to earn enough to buy sufficient nails, bolts, screws, red lead and oil (for, to make a good job of it, I wanted to paint all joints before assembling).

To get the timber from the mill to my home, a distance of about 7 miles, I used the old motor-bike. I don't want to discourse unduly on motor-bikes, but in fairness to it I must say that never has a machine given better service to man than my old Royal Enfield gave to me. Never did it have any care or attention bestowed on it, yet never did it refuse to go, and although it was only two and three-quarter horsepower, many, varied and heavy were the loads it carried. If a length of timber proved too long and cumbersome for the bike alone, I put one end of it on the carrier and the other on a two wheeled trolley that was towed behind. The traffic officers in Auckland soon got to know me

and they did their share. When they saw the old bike approaching with dangerous swerves and a load of timber, they always held up traffic coming the other way and beckoned me on with a friendly gesture.

At length I had enough material at home with which to carry on the good work. Another three months passed before all the frames were permanently in place.

I can hear you murmuring "another three months? The months seem to be passing rather quickly."

And they did. I took my time, although I worked hard. I wanted to make a good strong job of my ship, for if ever it was completed I intended to go to sea in it and I had no desire to risk my life in a craft that might fall to pieces on me at the first sign of bad weather.

Luckily I had been very careful over the sizes of the frames and now they were all in position there was very little paring to do. When a batten was bent round, it touched them all with the exception of an odd one that might be a slight fraction out. So that the paring was simple, and inside a week it was finished.

Now the ship was ready for the planking, perhaps the most difficult part of boat-building. I wanted to start planking from the bottom. Looking along the keel it was quite apparent that I would never bend and twist a plank 6 inches by 1½ inches without steaming it.

So that the next problem was the erection of a steam box. Out of packing cases I built a box and caulked it with bits of sacking to make it reasonably air-tight. An old sewer grating from the street acted as fire grate and a 5 gallon oil drum and some water piping went to complete the contrivance.

Then I started planking operations. The two garboard planks were shaped approximately and then given a couple of hours of good steaming. One was taken out and quickly clamped in position. But the clamps were scarcely half way home before the plank snapped with a loud report. It was no good crying over it. I shaped another, steamed it and tried again. This, too, snapped. I tried again and again without success, until it seemed that the planking was going to stop me from completing my ship. It was heart breaking. I visited the boat-building yards again.

Then, after spending over a week and breaking six planks, I learnt the secret. It was not length of time in the steam-box that the plank wanted, it was pressure of steam. So I gave it pressure. I built a huge fire under the boiler that roared and cackled; the steam-box bulged alarmingly; the steam hissed as it leaked out; and ultimately the plank bent round, not without some persuasion, but nevertheless nicely into place.

Then I began on the other garboard plank. It was no trouble. I had acquired the art of steaming.

Slowly, very slowly, the planking crept up each side of the boat. It was not so bad now. The garboards had been the hardest. But still it took a long time. Those planks were dashed awkward things to handle by oneself. Each one

was lifted by three sets of block and tackle till it was nearly in place; then I would mark on it where it had to be planed a little so that it would fit exactly on top of the plank already there. It would be lowered and I would plane off a fraction where it was marked. It was raised again, marked again, and lowered again; it was planed again, raised again, etc., until, at length, after perhaps a dozen attempts, it would fit exactly. Then it would be fastened in place and I would start all over again on the next plank.

Many weeks passed and at length the deck was reached. The planking was finished.

Another three weeks to pare the planking and to caulk it.

I worked it out - I hope I am right - that it doesn't matter what form the caulking cotton takes, as long as it is good sound cotton. I mean it can be the cotton specially prepared for caulking, or it can be cotton shirts, or cotton pyjamas, or cotton vests. Most of the caulking was done with the regulation caulking cotton, but in addition three shirts, a few pairs of old pyjamas and an odd singlet were torn into strips and rammed into the seams. Time alone will show if I made a mistake in departing from the regulation cotton. Up to the moment of writing, however, the pyjamas in the seams are doing very well and no signs of any leaks have been noticed.

With the planking and caulking finished, what I considered to be the worst and hardest part of the boat building was over. I could see nothing much now that would be likely to stop me from completing my ship.

The decking came next, two diagonal skins of 6 inch by 1 inch and a third fore and aft skin of 1¼ inches by 1 inch. That ought to make a good strong job of it with canvas soaked in tar and kerosene in between each skin. It was very tarry, black, and sticky when I arose from the deck after each day's work, but I was counting on the tar to insure against all leaks. I had never had the pleasure of cruising in a boat that didn't leak somewhere in the decks in heavy weather, and I hoped, just for a change, to make this ship watertight.

I don't mind much fighting the elements in the full fury of a storm, but I dislike intensely lying in a comfortable bunk with an occasional drop of water falling on my neck. So I splashed on the tar and kerosene with a light heart, especially over the place where I anticipated my bunk would be.

The deck was finally completed and then the cabin sides and cabin-top. I would have three openings in the cabin-top: the for'ard hatch, a big and generous skylight, and a large main hatch.

I can hear you deep-water sailors saying, "Young man, you are looking for trouble, having those big openings in your cabin-top. They will leak and your boat will be very wet in bad weather."

To which I would have replied at the time, "Oh no, I have seen plenty of leaking skylights, but mine will be all right. I am going to make a special job of it to make sure they will be quite watertight. And if, by some remote chance, they should leak a trifle, I will have nothing underneath any opening that will be affected by the water. Under the for'ard hatch there will be only

floor, and under the skylight will be the table, and an odd drop of water won't hurt that. Under the main hatch there will be again only floor."

However, I have to admit that, despite all the thought and work put into the hatches, they leaked in bad weather. The for'ard hatch was not so bad, for it was firmly bolted down, but the skylight leaked persistently until a canvas cover was made for it, when it was tolerably tight. The underside of the main hatch was always wet, that is, of course, in bad weather. But this was probably due more than anything else to the fact that the main hatch was always left open for convenience, light and air, and also because if water *did* go down, it didn't hurt anything.

But, in spite of the slight inconvenience caused by occasional leaks in bad weather, I was more than repaid by the large amount of light and air that came through the skylight and hatches in the fine weather. For, after all, it is only about two days in ten that one strikes bad weather at sea, and for five days in ten it is generally fine enough to keep the hatches open. In the tropics, particularly, one wants plenty of light and air, and it was my intention to do most of my cruising in the tropics.

As my ship slowly grew, it became more widely known, and many and varied visitors came round to inspect the work. Invariably they started the conversation by saying:

"My word! She *is* a size. How on earth are you going to get her into the water? Where are you going to launch her?"

"At Mission Bay. That's about the nearest convenient place."

"How far away is that?"

"About 6 miles."

"But how are you going to get her there?"

"Oh, I dunno. I haven't really gone into the matter yet, but I don't think we'll have any trouble."

And they would look at me as if to say, "Idiot! He's building a boat of such a size that when he's finished he won't be able to get it into the water."

One day the *Herald* press photographers came round and took a photograph of me standing proudly in from of my ship. The next day my photograph appeared in the papers, together with a description of my activities. Nothing had ever happened to me like this and I was a proud man that morning.

With the publication of the photograph the number of visitors increased to embarrassing proportions. They all wanted to talk, and talking was not going to get my ship finished. At week-ends, particularly, the visitors rolled up in dozens, so that ultimately I was driven from the scene of my activities to work in some quiet spot while Walter, who invariably came down, acted as host and showed the visitors the boat.

Everybody called it "the boat", or "Johnny Wray's boat". Walter called it "the boat" and so did I. There was nothing else to call it and we began to think it was high time that it had a name.

And this was perhaps the hardest part of the lot. It was very easy to think of a lot of names that would be quite suitable, but it was very hard to decide on the actual one by which the ship - that to me represented what was apparently my life's work - should be known.

Plenty of suggestions were forthcoming. Each visitor had some pet name that he thought would be most suitable. And it was the very number of them that made it so hard to choose. I liked the names "Spray," "Viking", "Seabird", "Wanderer", etc., but everybody thought they were too common. There were lots of suggestions of the "Typhoon", "Buccaneer", "Tornado" type, but I thought they were too fierce for my modest little craft. It would look so silly if I called her "Tornado", and she sank when she was launched. A lady friend wanted her named after her and my mother wanted her to be called "May", after *her*. It was all very difficult.

Then there were the Maori names. Most of the pleasure craft of Auckland have Maori names and they sound very well. So we looked through a Maori dictionary and found, among others, the name "Ngataki", which meant "Abode of the élite". This sounded quite impressive, and it was more or less decided on.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the native language of New Zealand, "Ngataki" is pronounced "Nar-tark-ey." Not till well afterwards, when we visited Australia (yes, I suppose you have guessed by now that the boat *did* float, and *did* sail, and we *did* go ocean cruising in her) did we find that "Ngataki" was hard to pronounce by people unused to the Maori language. Over there, we got "Gartaki", "Nagatiki", and "Nag -um - um you know what I mean - your boat, you know". For which I must duly apologize. If I had known the name was going to be hard to say, I would probably not have chosen it. "Ng" is common in Maori and no New Zealander thinks twice of it.

As the weeks passed it became usual to refer to my ship as the *Ngataki* and that is the name by which she became known.

Summer arrived again and sometimes, for a change, I would go cruising with Walter at the week-ends. It was on one of these week-end trips that I found the engine for my ship.

We happened to call at a bay where there lived a friend of ours, Eru by name, an old Maori fisherman. He had, he said, an old antiquated engine that he had thrown out of his launch about eight years previously. It had been out in the elements ever since, in a turnip field: If it was any good to us, we could have it. At least we could do no harm in having a look at it.

We went up to inspect it. After a little search it was found lying unobtrusively beneath a gorse bush. We rolled it out into the open, scraped the spare earth off it and gazed at it in wonder. "Engine" was rather a loose way of describing it. I suppose once upon a time the wheels had gone round, but it didn't look very hopeful. The flywheel was well jammed now. We scraped some more dirt and rust off it and unearthed a name-plate. It was a Zealandia

engine, made in Auckland in 1904, and the makers said that in 1904 it had developed five horsepower. It must have been one of the first engines ever made and it certainly looked like it. Of carburettors, ignition systems, or anything of that nature, that most people consider necessary to the best regulated engines, there was no sign.

The chances of it ever functioning again were pretty small, but it was finally decided to take it. There was a lot of heavy brass work, at least, that ought to fetch something from dealers who bought old metals. So, not without some difficulty, it was dragged down to the jetty and lowered gently into the *Wainui*.

We returned to Auckland and landed the engine at the Royal Akarana Yacht Club. Immediately it became an object of interest and ribald speculation. But I didn't care and, with the aid of a cold-chisel, an axe and a heavy hammer, I tried to dismantle it for easy porterage on the old bike. But it stubbornly resisted all my attempts and the only parts that came loose were those which broke off. It quickly became apparent that I would have to carry it home in one piece.

That trip was something of an achievement. The Zealandia weighed well over half a ton and it took four of us with a three-purchase tackle to lift it high enough to put the bike underneath it. Having lashed it well on the back of the bike, I mounted somewhat gingerly and we started off. On either side of the bike two stalwarts ran, helping to keep it upright and steady, until I had gathered enough speed to steer. Several times on the way home the rims of the wheels hit the road although I had pumped up the tyres to twice the normal pressure, The 5 mile trip home was completed without mishap. I stopped and the bike, now giving off large volumes of purple smoke, fell over as if exhausted, for it was far too heavy to hold upright when it was stationary. I undid the complicated system of lashing ropes, righted the bike and wheeled it away.

Thus I acquired the engine for my boat - at least, an engine of sorts. Closer examination seemed to indicate that the thing might go after all. I found I could turn the flywheel and that surely was something, for in these simple single-cylinder engines, if the piston moves up and down, if there is a carburettor and a supply of petrol, and if there is a spark, then the dashed thing ought to go. That was how I figured it, anyway. The digging up of a carburettor and the making of a spark should not be insuperable obstacles, so the prospects of being able to use it seemed much brighter.

But when, after much unbolting and soaking in kerosene, I finally succeeded in dismantling the engine, I found that during my attack on it at the Yacht Club with an axe I had *(a)* broken a balance weight on the crankshaft, *(b)* bent the shaft, *(c)* and cracked the flywheel.

Despite all this, I decided to install it. It might go and, even if it didn't, the moral effect was there. My boat would be an auxiliary.

So I fixed up the engine. Another balance weight was cast and I filed it

down until it fitted. The crankshaft was hammered unmercifully in an attempt to straighten it, but it defied all my attempts and to this day it is still bent. It produces a giddy wobble in the flywheel that puts the wind vertically up those who see the engine running for the first time. I riveted bits of iron over the cracks in the flywheel, to help hold it together, and underneath it in the boat I fastened some heavy pieces of wood, so that, if it *did* fly off one day, it would not go through the bottom of the boat.

A friend found a carburettor that fitted the engine and I personally made an ignition for it. That ignition was the pride of my life. I drilled a hole in the cam-shaft and into this I rammed a bolt. As the shaft revolved, the bolt hit a piece of hoop iron that was fastened to the engine bed. The end of this hoop iron hit another bit of iron, and to the second piece of iron was fastened a bit of brass which made contact with another bit of brass. Contact was made about top dead-centre of the engine and, with the help of a battery and a Ford coil, it made a beautiful spark. The bits of iron and brass were guided in their motion by nails, bolts, lengths of wire and an odd spring. You can take it from me it was a work of art.

And to everybody's surprise, and particularly to my own, the engine ultimately worked. One day, when everything had been fixed up, I was turning the flywheel in the faint hope that something might happen, when there was an explosion and the wheels started to go round. They continued to go round, the thing continued to explode, and, I mean, what more can anyone ask of an engine?

The rest of the work that remained to be done consisted mainly of finishing-off details-details necessary to make a complete ship, yet which took many months to complete.

But it was fairly easy work and the time passed quickly. With a light heart I attacked each new problem as it arose. If there is any work more pleasant than putting the final touches to your dream-ship, I have yet to try it.

One of the details that required a good deal of thought was the keel. A friend had told me where I could find a piece of the stem of a steamer, a heavy piece of iron that would make an ideal keel. It was buried in the sand on a popular beach close to Auckland. I accordingly went over and with a spear made from a piece of fencing wire began to prod the beach round about the place where I had been told it was lying.

The many holiday makers patronizing the beach at the time watched my activities with undisguised interest. Flatfish abound here and are generally caught by spearing them in shallow water, but none of the onlookers had seen fish speared in dry sand before.

After a lot more prodding the spear struck something hard. I started to dig and presently the iron was unearthed. It certainly was a large piece, 10 inches by 8 inches and about 10 feet long, and weighed I should think about a ton. It would be excellent for my purpose, but it would take a lot of getting home.

A few days later I returned to the beach with my father in his launch. At

low tide we made fast a number of lines to the iron. As the tide rose the launch was floated over the iron and the lines were made fast to her. The water crept up higher and higher till at last the launch lifted the iron. Then we slowly steamed across the harbour and as the tide fell the iron was deposited on a trolley on rails that was used for hauling up launches. With the winch we wound the trolley up until it was on a level with the road and there it had to wait until the next week-end when some of the members of the Ngataki Club would be free to increase our man-power.

I think, perhaps, that some explanation of the "Ngataki Club" should be given here. During the two years I had been building the *Ngataki*, so many things happened that it would not be possible to mention them all, but prominent among them was the formation of the Ngataki Club. It was a club comprised of friends who were most interested in the boat. The members organized a raffle to raise funds for the sails of my ship, for since I had lost the *Rewa's* big mainsail I had no prospect of replacing it. To become a member, one had to sell a book of sixpenny tickets. That was the only restriction on membership and the Club grew and flourished. Every week there would be a meeting held in the skeleton of the boat. The members would pay their share of a keg of beer and in consuming it would discuss the problems of the day. The meetings invariably finished up in a party of sorts and, from reports, it seems that the songs of the Club could be heard well over a mile away on quiet nights. Not until the members began to get too hoarse to sing any more were the meetings adjourned.

The members of the Club were true friends, ever ready to lend a helping hand, and the next week-end they arrived at the boat-shed, complete with the inevitable keg, to help get the keel home.

For a good afternoon's entertainment there is nothing to beat watching, or for that matter participating in, the shifting of a ton dead-weight by a light-hearted assembly of young men with a barrel of beer at their disposal. Amid loud cheers the keel was lowered on the trolley behind the old bike.

It was a matter of grave doubt whether the trolley would stand the weight, and of even graver doubt if the bike would pull it; but the natural optimism of youth, stimulated by the contents of the keg, swept aside all doubts and we started off.

But the first hill had us bluffed. The bike roared as I slipped the clutch, the Ngataki Club pulled and yelled and pushed, but the trolley did not budge. Heroically one of the members volunteered to go and fetch his car, and again things began to happen. The car hummed, the bike roared and spluttered, the troops pushed, and the keel began to move again. In this way we arrived home and triumphantly deposited the keel by the ship.

Then followed the problem of fastening it in position. I could not hope to drill holes through the iron and bolt it on in the usual way. Drilling wood is bad enough and I steadfastly drew the line at drilling an inch hole through 10 inches of iron. The only other method seemed to be to clamp iron bands round

the metal and up each side of the wooden keel above it. I had some pieces of 3 inch by ½ inch iron, which would make excellent straps if I could bend them. But iron 3 inch by ½ inch is pretty rigid and it takes a bit of bending. A heavy sledge-hammer will, I found, bounce harmlessly off it without producing any effect. The only thing to do was to heat it, so the next item on the programme was a forge.

I will not weary you with my unsuccessful attempts to construct a home-made forge, for I would like, as far as possible, to forget about them. It was Bert's idea that I use the family vacuum cleaner for the forced draught and it was Bert who personally supervised the erection of the forge that was to be the wonder of all visitors.

It was rigged up one fine day with the business end of the vacuum cleaner directed underneath the fire. But when the current was switched on the force of air was so great that all the burning coals were blown clean out of the grate. Gingerly we returned the hot coals to the forge and then joined a couple of electric lamps in series with the motor of the cleaner to reduce the speed a little. This time it went quite smoothly and everything became white-hot in an amazingly short space of time.

I turned my hand to bending the lengths of iron and found that even in this, like so many other simple looking things, there is more to it than meets the eye. Watching a blacksmith at work, some of the things he does seem almost childishly easy and the casual observer feels that he could do it quite as well. After all, what could be more simple than heating a piece of iron and bending it?

And it is quite simple - till you come to try it. Then you find that that forge is dashed hot and, besides heating the iron, can burn you; those tweezer affairs, with which you handle the work, are damned awkward things to handle and are not designed properly at all. You find that the iron develops an infuriating habit of always falling down on its wrong side on the anvil ... and you find that a piece of iron, even though it looks perfectly cold, can be deuced hot! After two or three attempts you find that the iron has become so weakened at the joint that you have to get a new bit and start all over again.

In the early stages I invariably heated the iron too much and burnt a good deal of it away. I had never previously realized that it was so easy to burn iron; it was quite an education. In fact the whole work was a very definite education. You learn infinitely more about boat building, or about anything else, by trying it yourself than you will ever learn from books or from watching someone else do the work.

However, I eventually succeeded in making four iron straps for the keel. They were not very elegant looking and I did not trouble to show them to anybody, but at least they were strong. Anyway they would be hidden from the eyes of man, for they would be countersunk into the keel. The iron keel was 8 inches wide and the wood above it was 12 inches wide, so I decided to put 2 inches of cement on each side of the iron to make it flush with the wood.

The cement would cover the straps and would preserve them at the same time. The straps got a pretty severe testing later on and they stood up to it very well. I was satisfied.

This outside work was done in daylight and when it grew dark I carried on with the work inside, the bunks, the lining, the lockers, etc. For there was electric light in the shed. It was supplied by a couple of wires that surreptitiously crept round the garden and ultimately disappeared into the house. The wires had been suitably disguised, as interference with the lights is against regulations.

If any electrical inspector had seen my lighting system, I am afraid I should have been deprived of it; in which case the progress of the boat would have suffered considerably, for quite a lot of work was done at night. I worked long hours on my ship, starting generally at daybreak and often not knocking off until 10 p.m. Luckily, no inspectors visited me and I was able to carry on.

The electrical system was quite efficient in so far that the lights generally went on when you turned on the switch. But in wet weather something seemed to go wrong with the works and the shed became alive, so that it became a matter of some doubt as to what parts of it you could touch without getting a shock. Even the tools resting on wooden shelves inside the shed were, contrary to all known electrical laws, highly charged.

At first this was most disconcerting, for, if there is one thing I dislike intensely, it is getting an electrical shock when I am least expecting it. It was a great pity, I thought at the time, that you can't tell if a wire is alive by just looking at it. There ought to be some way, but I don't know of it. The only method I know is by trial and error. But after a while I found which things I could touch with impunity and which things I could not.

On a wet night it was quite a common thing to see me circling round a metal plane, eyeing it as a cat eyes a mouse and wondering if it was alive and what was the best method of picking it up without getting the shock that would probably accompany it. Or you might have seen me gingerly reaching with a long stick for a saw on the top shelf and pushing it down to the floor before triumphantly picking it up. These are all mere details, I admit, and hardly worth mentioning, but they were very amusing - from the observer's point of view.

While I am on electrical gadgets, I feel my electric glue-pot deserves some mention. Probably I should not bother with such details as glue-pots and certainly I should not reveal the sinful pride I felt for this one. But in this story I am determined to keep absolutely to facts and it was a definite fact that I was very proud of my glue pot. For one thing it worked very well and, for another, it looked so dashed impressive in action.

The deck planks were narrow, only 1¼ inch wide, so that the seams in the deck were numerous and long. They were to be filled with marine glue, and looking over the miles of deck, it seemed that the job would take years, unless I could rig up some contrivance to keep the glue hot while I poured it in. I

tried methylated spirit lamps under the pot, electric soldering irons in it, and many other suggestions, before finally perfecting the Wray electric glue-pot.

An old wireless transformer was rewound so as to give about 10 volts in the secondary. A small coil of nichrome resistance wire was fastened in the bottom of an old teapot - my glue-pot - and the resistance wire ran down the spout to keep that hot. There was another small coil at the end of the spout to radiate heat on to the seam. In my previous attempts, even if the glue was boiling in the pot, I had found that by the time it had run down the spout and into the seam it was too cold to sink far into the seam. The transformer supplied the power to keep the resistance wire hot.

This pot worked very well, but the load on the transformer was too great and it rapidly grew too hot. To remedy this, some of the laminations were removed from the core and larger sheets of iron were substituted. These stuck well out and acted as cooling fins for the core. After this it kept moderately cool, although the fins vibrated and made a loud humming noise like an aeroplane. But I did not mind. The noise made the outfit more impressive. To the uninitiated it looked like some weird infernal machine, with the transformer roaring and hopping about and the glue-pot sparking and smoking. I generally turned it on when there were plenty of visitors present to show how clever I was at being able to work such a complicated and diabolical affair.

However, it did the job very quickly and very well, which was the main thing.

It was about this time that my father and I ventured forth in his launch to look for suitable timber for the mast and spars.

We were cruising round the Great Barrier Island, a large island about 60 miles from Auckland, when we met some Maori friends. That night we attended a tangi (a large Maori feast), during which some of them told us where there were some fine, straight kauri rikas (young kauri trees). They offered to come and help us get the timber out of the forest and it was arranged that next day we would all go and get the spars.

The Maori is a free and easy, happy-go-lucky sort of fellow. He seldom works more than he has to and, when he does work, he makes as much play out of it as possible. I will never forget that day. Early in the morning about twenty Maori girls and boys came aboard the launch, cheerfully looking forward to a good day's fun.

And we had it. We set sail for another bay which would be nearer the great kauri trees. Having arrived there, an hour's hiking took us to the edge of the kauri belt. These magnificent monarchs of the forest are often 50 feet round the base, and go up 200 feet or so as straight as a die. I looked at them and thought what a wonderful lot of good timber there would be in any one of them, if we could only get it out. Enough for a dozen boats like mine.

But it was the rikas that we were most interested in at the moment. We found a bunch that averaged about a foot in diameter at the bottom and went

straight up for about 50 feet. At least, looking casually at them, they appeared to go straight up, but when each was viewed from directly underneath, there always seemed to be a slight kink near the top, or a faint bend in the middle, or some other defect that would make it equally useless as a spar.

Two of us concentrated on looking for a suitable spar, while the rest of them hunted wild pig. The true Maori, when on a picnic such as this, seldom takes anything with him to eat. If he cannot find or catch sufficient food in the bush, he is a very poor hunter.

At length we came upon a suitable tree. It was as near straight as dammit and would make a grand mast. No sooner had we found it than the distant whoops of the Maoris and the penetrating squealings of a wild pig denoted that their hunting had been successful. They hunt with no better weapon than an old clasp knife and there is invariably a violent struggle between man and beast before the latter's throat is ultimately cut. Personally, I wouldn't go near one of the brutes if I were fully armed and I always had my eye on a suitable tree to scale at the first sign of a wild pig.

I cut the tree and with a crash that awoke the forest echoes it fell. The bark was knocked off and the end was notched to take the tow-rope. By this time the others had returned, complete with a part-worn-looking pig.

The men of the party immediately started off on the long journey back to the sea dragging the spar, while the girls took over the cooking of the pig in a native oven. The method is effectively simple. First a hole is dug in the ground, a fire is lit in the hole and built up until it is blazing merrily, when a number of round stones are thrown on top of it. The fire is smothered, but the stones get very hot. Leaves are placed on them, followed by the cleaned pig and then more leaves. Finally earth is thrown over the whole lot.

We reached the sea with our tree, tied it behind the launch and returned for two more for the boom and gaff. These were much smaller and were quite easily found and towed down.

We returned again.

The pig had been cooking for about four hours and it ought to be well done. The earth was shovelled away and the leaves carefully lifted so that no earth fell on the food. A deliciously appetizing smell filled the air as the pork was uncovered, cooked to a turn. We needed no encouragement to fall to and soon the pig was looking definitely the worse for wear.

The day wore on. We returned to the launch, took our Maori friends home, attended a big dance that night and the next morning left for home with the three spars. On our arrival at the Yacht Club the old bike and some of the Ngataki Club were again called into commission. That mast was pretty heavy, being 44 feet long, 11 inches in diameter at the bottom and tapering to 6 inches at the top. But it was not as heavy as the keel had been and no real difficulty was experienced. We tied one end on to the trailer and the other to the back of the bike. With four members of the Club pushing, we started gaily off on our 5 mile trip home. Along the flat the bike could pull its load without

help and the Club, seeing no reason why they should canter at a smart dog-trot beside the mast, quite rightly hopped, on it. With legs astride, they waved their arms and yelled riotously to let the world know they were coming. At the first bill, as the over-burdened bike slowed up, the Club jumped off and pushed, but as soon as the top was reached they hopped on again. And so the spars arrived home.

On reading over what I have written, I find I have perhaps devoted undue space to the many details that go towards the making of a ship. I will endeavour to push on more speedily.

The ballast consisted of about 5 tons of fire-bars, extracted with much labour from old ferry-boats (with, of course, the permission of the owners). They were tied in bundles of about a dozen and set in cement blocks, to fit the shape of the bilge.

The drawers and fittings inside the boat were constructed from a heavy oak beam taken from underneath an old railway carriage which a friend of mine had bought and was using as a cottage. As a cottage the carriage suffered little by the removal of that beam and in exchange for a morning's work helping to place the carriage in position I obtained that piece of oak.

The teak panelling (yes, there was teak panelling inside my ship) was from a heavy door off the old *Rewa*. That door was tough and sturdily bolted together and it barked at me for a long while before it was finally conquered. But I obtained a lot of wonderful panelling from it.

The stove for the galley, a wood stove, was bought at an auction sale for the small sum of 10s.

The water-tanks consisted of three 54 gallon drums that had once contained bitumastic paint (the paint used for painting inside water-tanks). So my tanks were well painted inside and never gave any trouble, always keeping the water in first-class order. They were built in round the cockpit and connected by pipes to facilitate filling, but each was kept isolated by a cock when cruising in case any leak occurred in one tank.

I was fastidiously careful in the installation of these tanks, for I wanted to make sure of an adequate and reliable fresh water supply. I have never fancied dying of thirst at sea.

The glass for the portholes and skylight was cut from jagged pieces of plate glass found on a large rubbish heap where the city council reclaimed land from the harbour.

I found that to be a full-fledged boat-builder you have to be a jack of all trades. You must be a glass-cutter as well as carpenter, plumber, engineer, electrician, painter, cabinetmaker, etc. The term boat-building seems to cover the combined arts of all the trades. No wonder one's first essays at it are so remarkably educative!

One November morning I went to work on my boat. I wondered what I would work on that day and was surprised to find that very little more remained to be done. The fact dawned on me quite suddenly and provided a

real thrill of surprise. By now I had come to look on the building of the boat as a life's work. It would never be finished, but it was very pleasant work. Now I realized she was nearly complete.

The decks were oiled and varnished and looked very well with the black seams contrasting with the white narrow deck planks. The hull was caulked and puttied and smoothed off ready for painting. That's what I would do. I would give the top-sides their first coat of flat white paint.

But how far down would the white paint go? Where was the water-line?

That was a poser. And the more I thought about it, the bigger problem it became. During the building I had had, of course, a rough idea of where that water-line would come. But now it was necessary to determine exactly where it was going to be and this promised to be a question of importance.

I produced the sawn sections of the model, paper and pencil, and began to attack the problem in earnest.

It would depend, of course, on the weight of the finished boat and this was the first thing to find. I added up all the weights of wood, ballast, stoves, engines, etc., and found it would amount in all to about 11 tons.

Now to a certain extent it would have to be a matter of trial and error. I drew a line on the model where I thought the water-line would come and, after spending many hours on it, I worked out to the best of my ability the volume of the ship below that water-line. From this it was easy to find the weight of water that the ship would displace, which ought to be (but unfortunately was not) equal to the weight of the ship. The weight of water displaced by the ship beneath the water-line was about 15 tons.

This sounds a bit complicated and for all I know may be false reckoning, but my reasoning was from first principles which are generally right.

Mathematics is not my best subject and after all this theorizing my brain, unused to such intense concentration, refused to cope with the situation. I developed a headache.

If I lowered the tentative water-line about 5 inches it ought to be about right; and this I decided on. But on going out to the ship, this new water-line looked low. In fact it was very definitely too low. There would be acres of top-side showing. So I raised it 4 inches and called it a day. Anyway, I reflected, most of my ballast was to be inside, and I would be able to alter the trim of the ship if she did not float anywhere near the water-line I had painted on her. Quickly I bent a batten round and pencilled in the water-line in case I should decide to change it again.

The top-sides got their first coat of paint that afternoon. It made an enormous difference to my ship. Till then, looking at it through gaps in the wall of the shed, the boat might have been almost anything to the casual observer. Now it was definitely a ship and, to my mind, a serviceable-looking ship. The water-line looked just about right. I was very proud of it and I did not fail to tell visitors of the highly complicated calculations involved in the working out of its proper position.

A few days later I began to dismantle the shed and the *Ngataki* was for the first time exposed to the sun, the elements, and the world's gaze. Gaily I knocked the rusty bits of iron off the roof and tore the old canvas off the sides. This marked a very important milestone in the work. Up till now it had not been possible to get a good look at her for she had completely filled the shed and, viewed from any angle, only a small portion of her was visible at a time. With the removal of the shed the full run of her lines was revealed for the first time. I spent a long time gazing at her from every angle, from the bow, the stern, from the top of a tree in the garden, from the roof of the house and from the roofs of neighbouring houses.

She looked all right to me. I took a lot of photos of her; the press took photos of her; my friends took photos of her, and I was happy. As a matter of fact I had taken photographs of the boat in all the various stages of construction; of the keel just after it had been manoeuvred into position, of the backbone, of the frames, and of the ship half-planked. It was a wonderful collection. To my intense sorrow I no longer have them, for I lost them all in the first hurricane we encountered.

The problem that became more and more apparent as the boat neared completion was its removal to the water. Up till now I had not thought of the matter much. All my thoughts and energies had been directed on the ship itself, but friends had for a long time worried themselves on this score. A neighbour used regularly to tell me a sad story of a man who built himself a boat up in the hills of the West Coast. He completed his work and then found he could not move it. He tried for weeks and months to move his ship, but it would not budge. He ultimately gave it up and the craft is still there, rotting away in the hills of the rugged West Coast. Yes, it could be seen any time I cared to accompany my neighbour into the hills.

A very sad story and, if by chance it was true, it ought to have given me much food for thought. But it takes a bit of swallowing that a man should build a boat and then leave it to rot because he could not get it into the water.

At any rate I told him if I could not shift my boat I would leave it in the front garden and live on it. I had a comfortable bunk to sleep in and a good stove to cook on. I would live aboard and pretend I was at sea.

But I knew that in these times modern man with modern tools can shift anything; that is, if he spends the time and the inevitable money on the job. This last factor - money - was my main handicap, for my assets now totalled to just over £2 in cash. I still had the old bike, but owing to its dilapidated appearance no one seemed to want to buy it.

However, my luck was in. I was fortunate in making the acquaintance of the manager of one of Auckland's leading transport companies. He had several times visited my ship. "If a man can build a boat like that," he had said, "he deserves all the help he can get." And he gave me all the help he could. He lent me all the jacks, levers, and timber that I required to move the ship; he lent me a huge boiler wagon to carry the boat and he lent me a big Leyland

Tiger truck with which to tow it. All I had to pay for was the petrol used by the truck. This generous offer completely solved the problem of transport and I worried no more about it.

Ngataki Under Construction

In The Front Garden At Home

CHAPTER V

The Lauching

At length the great day arrived - the day when I could I lay my boat was finished, as far as I could finish it at home. It was the day when the *Ngataki* started on her great voyage to the sea.

To be honest, she did not get very far that day, for the day's total work consisted in moving her about 3 feet. But, I reasoned, if I could move her 3 feet in a day, it was reasonable to suppose that it would only be a question of time before the 6 miles to the water had been covered.

Trying to push an 11 ton boat round the place by yourself is no joke. I could not lift her straight out with any jack I had, so I had to use two levers - two huge beams 25 feet long and 12 inches by 3 inches section - to take some of the weight off the jacks. The outside ends of the levers were loaded up with ballast until they bent alarmingly, but they took most of the weight of the ship. Then, with the jacks, I could lift her comparatively easily.

But I had been promised assistance. Charlie, another nautical friend, had been given a few days off from work and he had undertaken to come along and help.

He was true to his word. The next morning he arrived with Bob, a young boy of twelve, and the three of us started work.

We made some skids for the ship to slide on and greased them well. We knocked together a cradle of sorts to hold the boat upright. With a couple of timber-jacks, a little man-power and a little science, the going was surprisingly good and things began to move smoothly.

The *Ngataki* had been built on what had once been a front lawn. It was now no more than a sloping piece of ground covered with empty drums, roofing iron, ballast and assorted timber! The idea was to turn the ship round and then jack her sideways until she was on the path leading to the gate. This path, about 40 yards long, sloped at a steep angle down towards the road. We would have no difficulty, we thought, in sliding her down the path. She ought to go quite easily.

By the following afternoon the *Ngataki* had been jacked on to the path and was now ready for the descent to the road. In view of the slope I thought I should be able to push her by myself, so I took up my position at the stern with a timber-jack. Charlie and Bob watched and held the props on either

side, for we did not trust the flimsy cradle.

"All ready there? Then, here goes." I wound up the jack. The heel of it sank deep into the asphalt path, but the boat did not move. I put all my weight into it and the boat moved a couple of inches.

"It's still pretty hard," I said, panting. "We'd better put some more grease on the skids."

The skids were smothered with grease; this time it must be easier. We resumed our stations.

"Right there? - right!" I wound up the jack again.

She started to move down the path and the jack fell away from her.

But she did not stop moving.

As she moved further on to the greasy skids she gathered way rapidly. Her huge bulk began to recede from us and we watched her spellbound. We had had no idea that things like this could happen.

Dimly I was aware of the crashes of falling props, the splintering of timber and the small cradle collapsing. In agony I watched my ship - my life's work - sliding ever more rapidly down the path, plunging to destruction.

In those few seconds I thought of all the work, worry and time I had put into my ship. Was it all to be wasted? I could do nothing to help her, for it had all happened so suddenly. Curse those skids! Why had they become so slippery, all of a sudden?

Fascinated, we watched. Now she was careering on the way with nothing to support her, perfectly balanced on an even keel. Travelling at a giddy pace, she reached the end of the long length of skids and, with a shuddering, thundering crash, she nose-dived and skewed round. Her bow ploughed deep into the asphalt and then went through a stone wall at the side of the path.

In a smother of dust she came to rest with her stern high in the air and her bow buried in the wall and earth. In her wake lay broken skids and props, jacks and smashed timber!

My heart started to beat again as we ran down to inspect the damage. The stern seemed all right. A quick glance along the bottom showed only a few slight gashes in the planking. It was at the bow where the damage would be. But the bow was hidden by bushes and earth of the garden.

A few minutes' work with a spade sufficed to show that the damage done to the bow was remarkably small. A few scars and bruises on the planking were all. It was amazing luck, for it had seemed when the ship was sliding down the path that nothing could save it from complete wreck.

The accident had one redeeming feature: it had increased enormously my faith in the ship. Surely she must be massively strong to escape with so little damage after such a tousing. The long furrow her forefoot had ploughed in the asphalt and the gaping hole in the thick stone wall were positive proof of her strength.

It took us two days to right the boat, turn her round and get her once more on an even keel on the path. Now she was within a few feet of the road, but

we were not taking any more chances. There was no more grease on the skids and we tied ropes to her and fastened them to trees behind us to check her if she again took it into her head to start off without us.

But no more trouble was experienced at least, no more than was to be expected in the circumstances. There was the usual profanity as something heavy fell on someone's toes, the usual rushing about and the usual frantic grabs at falling props as the ship gave unhealthy lurches. But that was all part of the day's work.

The next day we had just finished manoeuvring her round so that she was parallel to the road when the boiler wagon arrived. The next job was to lift the boat on to the wagon - no mean feat since the wagon was 4 feet high.

To lift her the first 2 feet was no trouble at all, but when she was 3 feet up things began to get a little unstable. As we lifted her we leaned her over, for we wanted her on her bilge on the wagon. This, of course, made things a bit more complicated.

We lifted her a few more inches and pushed. Things were definitely wobbly now. The *Ngataki* seemed to be miles up in the air. Four feet may not sound much to lift a boat, but just try it. We had devised a complicated system of props so that it was, theoretically, impossible for the boat to fall in any direction. We checked them over, reinforced them and began to lift again.

And then it happened.

Exactly what it was, I don't know, but something gave way - definitely. I am not naturally very brave and no one knows it better than I, so, when something gave way with an ominous crack and the boat began to fall. I leapt quickly out of the danger zone. Charlie leapt dear, too. But Bob was struck by a falling prop and knocked on to the road underneath the ship. I caught a glimpse of him falling and then the huge bulk of the falling ship blocked my view.

The clatter of falling timbers was drowned by the thunderous crash as the *Ngataki* hit the road. Sick with fear, we hurried to where Bob had fallen.

Thank heaven, he was all right! A pile of wood blocks beside which he had fallen had saved him. He lay in the small space between the keel and the pile of wood, looking very pale round the gills. Very carefully and slowly he crawled out from beneath the boat and as he drew himself clear he forced a smile. He was a game little blighter.

"That was a near thing."

"It was," Bob admitted. "I don't want too many more of *them*."

There was a long pause.

"I think we've had enough for one day, chaps," I said.

"Let's call it a day. I don't much feel like doing any more just now." And I didn't. Bob's narrow escape had made me feel quite sick.

"Come on, we can carry on for a while," Charlie urged. "Anyway, how's the old ship?"

Under the stress of the moment I had completely forgotten about her. We

turned to her, but again could see no damage. We lifted the bilge a few inches off the ground and found that the chine was broken and three planks adjacent were cracked. But it was remarkably small considering the force with which the boat had hit the road.

Nevertheless, if there were many more of these crashes there would not be much left of poor *Ngataki*. At any rate, she was certainly getting a severe testing. If she could stand these tremendous jolts, she ought to be able to stand any seas the ocean could produce.

The next morning we started work again. I thought Bob might have had enough of it, but he came down as willing as ever. This time we were more careful - much more careful. We began by collecting more blocks to put under the keel, for lack of them had, I think, been the cause of the trouble.

We were all suffering a little from nerves. While jacking up the keel, the slightest crack or noise anywhere was enough to make me leap from under the boat like a scalded cat. All movements were stealthy and furtive and the jacks were wound up with intense caution.

But this time all was well. Dusk found the boat on the wagon and I breathed a sigh of relief. The worst of it was over.

The following afternoon a low rumbling announced the arrival of the lorry to tow the boat away. It was one of the largest lorries in Auckland, yet I doubted if it would shift the wagon. However we got to work loading the lorry with ballast and assorted gear to give the wheels a grip on the road.

Soon we were ready. The lorry's engine roared and the *Ngataki* started to move. I marvelled at the power of the lorry.

Everything went well until we reached the first hill, the steepest hill on the route. Slowly we climbed up the first half and then something went wrong with the works. The engine stalled. The lorry and wagon stopped and then started to move backwards. The driver stuck his head out of the cab and yelled "Chock the wheels, I can't hold her with the brakes!"

Hurriedly we threw a beam under the wheels which brought the ship to rest with a shuddering jolt.

The driver started the engine again, gave her full throttle until she was roaring and threatening to fall to pieces, and threw in the clutch fiercely. We jumped forward about a yard and the engine stalled again. The driver swore fluently. We followed up with the chock under the wheels. We tried again and the same thing happened. We tried many times and each time we gained 2 or 3 feet.

Yard by yard we slowly climbed the steepest part of the hill. It must have been a colossal strain on the gears and clutch and spoke volumes for the wonderful workmanship and strength that must be put into modern lorries to enable them to stand up to such abnormal loads.

At length the top of the hill was reached and no more of this difficulty was encountered. Slowly we proceeded while I proudly walked alongside the boat, watching anxiously to see if she moved at all on the wagon.

By this time there was quite a procession following us. Stray onlookers, a few cars, cats, dogs and all the small boys in the neighbourhood. They seemed to think there would be some fun before my ship reached the water and, at a smart walking pace, they followed in the hope that something exciting would happen. I sincerely hoped they would be disappointed. I had had quite enough excitement already.

But sure enough it came. Ahead, there was a bridge and on approaching it we saw a notice which read quite clearly: "MAX. LOAD 6 TONS."

Now the lorry with its ballast must have weighed at least 12 tons, the wagon stated quite definitely that IT weighed 5 tons, 9cwt., and the boat as it was must have weighed a minimum of 7 tons. At a conservative estimate, a total of 24 tons. And we had to go over a 6 ton bridge!

We stopped. "I didn't know this bridge was here," said the driver, "we can't go over that."

There seemed to be too many catches in the building of boats. We went and looked at the beams underneath the bridge. It was a fairly new bridge.

"I think it will be all right," I said. "I think we ought to give it a go."

"Blowed if I know," said the driver. "We'll try if you like, but you take all responsibility."

Well now, that didn't sound too good. But it was little use leaving the boat this side of the bridge and there was no other way to the sea. I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Let her go.

"All right," I said. "I'll take the responsibility."

We started off again, taking things very easy. We began to crawl over the bridge. The procession, acting on the advice of the driver, stopped at the edge of the bridge, and watched, hoping, probably, that something terrible would happen to quench their thirst for excitement. There was not one of us who did not half expect the *Ngataki* to be prematurely and violently launched there and then into the water 30 feet below us.

I began to realize what the victims of pirates had had to put up with when they walked the plank. Walking on something that might, at any moment, give way and precipitate you into the waters below.

But we reached the other side safely and I breathed a sigh of relief. Glancing back, I thought I could see disappointment written on the faces of the procession, as it advanced again.

Mission Bay was reached without further incident.

The tide was out now. We wanted to get the boat as far out on the beach as possible, so the high night tide would float her off. We examined the sand. It ought to be hard enough to take the weight.

There was a concrete ramp down to the beach. The driver gave her full throttle down the ramp and she roared down it, rapidly gaining enough speed to take her over the loose sand at the top of the beach. We were over it and had got within 20 yards of the water when the wagon sank deep into the sand. The lorry's wheels continued turning and they, too, sank deep in.

It appeared that was as far as we were going to get. The wagon was unhitched, but when we went to move the lorry we found it was well and truly stuck. We levered it, jacked it and pulled it, but it would not budge.

"____the___ ____ thing," said the driver. "We'II have to unload it and be pretty quick too. The tide's coming in fast."

It was. It was nearly up to us. All hands got to work unloading the lorry.

Then we tried again. The procession got on the end of a long rope and pulled; we levered and jacked; and the lorry kicked and bumped, but it did not move.

"It's no good," said the driver. "We'll have to get some more help."

Again the old bike saved the situation. Somebody rode it into town to get another lorry and we could do nothing but wait. The incoming tide was up to the lorry and I had visions of having to pay for all damage if we could not get it out of the water in time.

The tide was well over the hubs and the small waves had reached the bonnet, when the second lorry came rushing along the road. It went straight into the water and, with a wire rope, was connected to our lorry. With no apparent effort it pulled it out of the sand and back on to the road. Again I breathed a sigh of relief.

We could do little now but wait for the incoming tide to float the boat. My people arrived with a bottle of wine to christen her. My friends arrived with a large keg of beer to celebrate the launching.

In view of the unusual circumstances it was a matter of grave doubt as to when was the correct time to christen her. On the builder's slip, of course, it is easy. She is christened just before the boat slides into the water. There are loud cheers, flags fly, and the boat starts moving down her ways into the sea.

But here, somehow, it was different. It was growing dark and the boat was still on the wagon. She was totally surrounded by water now and only the more daring spirits who chose to take off their shoes and roll up their pants could get near her.

We broached the keg in the hope that it might give us some idea of the correct procedure in christening. The *Ngataki* Club arrived with another keg and we broached that.

About 11 p.m., when the festivities were going their strongest, I sobered up sufficiently to remember that within an hour, if the *Ngataki* did not float off, we would have to get into the water and jack her off the wagon for it was high tide at midnight.

At a quarter to twelve she was still far from floating and so several of us took off our clothes and waded out to the boat. The timber-jacks were now completely submerged and so we had to take a deep breath, dive down, turn the jacks a little and then come up for air. It was great fun.

Looking back on it, remembering that we worked in darkness and that one or two of the lads had, like myself, refreshed themselves at the kegs during the evening, it was remarkable that no one was injured.

Then someone gave a harder thrust than usual with a jack and the boat fell off the wagon and into the water.

My ship was launched!

We cheered and, still cheering, towed her out into deep water, where she was anchored for the night.

We went down below and found she was leaking badly. The water was already over the floorboards. This was not so good. She must have opened out with the jarring and straining she had received on the journey down. Or had I forgotten to caulk some of the seams? Two of the company bailed out while I looked for the leak with a torch. It was obviously a bad leak for with the two of them bailing out we were just holding our own with the water.

Ultimately I discovered it. Stupid ass! I had forgotten the hole for the propeller shaft. The hole was there all right but there was no shaft in it yet and the water was gushing through an inch hole. No wonder we couldn't make any headway with it!

Inspiration failed us and we could think of nothing with which to block up the hole. If we had had another barrel of beer, it was argued, the cork from it would have served admirably. So we took it in turns covering the hole with our hands, while others went in search of another barrel of beer.

It arrived. We removed the bung and it made an excellent cork for the propeller shaft. But a barrel of beer without a bung will not keep ...

Daybreak found us still celebrating. Then we suddenly remembered that the *Ngataki* had still to be christened! Terrible thought! It was probably most unlucky to launch a boat without christening it and I would probably want all the luck I could get, cruising in my home-made boat.

We christened her many times over. Not with wine, for we could not find it; nor with beer, for there was none left; but with bottles of salt water, there was plenty of that.

Later on my father arrived in his launch as had been arranged the previous day and towed us to the Yacht Club, where we stepped the mast.

A little over a week later we had our first sail. She was not really ready, but that mattered little. The Auckland yachting fleet goes away *en masse* on Christmas Day and we had to be with them.

Luckily it was a flat run to Kawau, the centre of activities, or we would never have got there: there were barely enough shrouds to support the mast and only enough temporary ropes and blocks to haul the mainsail half-way up. There were, as yet, no cleats, bollards, or ringbolts in the deck and the halyards and sheets had to be all brought back and made fast to the horse. It was not exactly a pretty sight and I don't know what would have happened if we had gybed, for the wind was quite fresh. But we didn't. We arrived and were soon anchored in that secure haven, Mansion House, on Kawau.

Perhaps I had better draw a modest veil over our activities during the next few days. Sufficient is it to say that in between the festivities we did a little rigging.

At the end of a week we were ready to go for our first real sail. But even this was not a proper test, as there were over thirty of us on board. However, it sufficed to show me that my boat was not such a sluggard as most people had thought she would be. She sailed moderately well, as well, anyway, as her short length, heavy displacement, wide beam and small sail area would allow.

In light airs she was, naturally enough, fairly sluggish, but in a fresh breeze she could get along very well. And, after all, it was for heavy weather that I had designed her. Any boat can be comfortable in fine, light weather, but there are not so many that are still comfortable when it is blowing. And what does it matter if you take a little longer to get there if you are quite comfortable on board? I was satisfied with my ship.

CHAPTER VI

Preparations For A Cruise

As I sit down to pen these words, I have in my mind's eye a mental picture of you as you read what I have written. You are seated in a comfortable arm-chair, drawing at your favourite pipe and with your feet well up on the mantel-piece. You are still fairly well tanned from the sun and wind and salt water of last season's sailing. You are hard of eye and square of jaw. It is obviously useless to try to deceive you-utterly useless to trump up some story that during the few months which followed I did anything in the nature of work. I may as well admit straight off that I did-well, call it nothing. Nothing, that is, except sail my boat, cruise in my boat, eat, sleep and drink in my boat.

For me there will never be any pleasure in this world that will compare with those months of sailing round our beautiful coast in my own boat. They were days of perfect bliss.

I visited all the beaches where I had found kauri, logs. I went ashore and looked at the places where I had found the different logs. When I was alone I talked to the beaches: "There you are, Beach, just look what I've built out of those old logs, that you've been hiding all these years beneath your old grey stones." And I would look at where that log had been, at the slight hole that was in some cases still visible between the rocks; and then I would look at my trim white vessel peacefully anchored in the calm waters out in the bay.

Some of the timber in that boat of mine had, but two years ago, been lying here amongst these rough rocks in the shape of a weathered kauri log.

It was all very wonderful; at least, I thought so.

The timber in my boat was more than just timber to me. Every solitary piece of wood in it I knew and I loved. The deck beam just above my head in my bunk had come out of the log with the slight bend which I had found one sunny winter's day on the little beach on the outside of Waiheke Island. Long before it was ever built into the boat that beam and I were fast friends. It is a true friend still. Day after day, year in, year out, it cheerfully and steadily holds up that small portion of deck above my head, doing its duty nobly and

well. It is the same with every other bit of wood in my ship.

You probably think me childish for harbouring such ideas, but to me it was all very wonderful.

And so I cruised on and on and on. Sometimes with friends who had holidays from work, sometimes single-handed.

One day I discovered with a start that I had been cruising for six months without a break. It was six months since I had launched the *Ngataki*. I could hardly believe it. I looked at the calendar again, but there was no mistake. It seemed only a week since we had set sail for the first time.

In that six months I had done absolutely nothing - nothing but cruise round and enjoy myself.

Some people on such evidence would brand me lazy, but I'm not, really. I mean, whenever I have been loafing around for six months or so, I begin to think it's time I thought of doing something.

Besides, it was mid-winter again and the weather was not very conducive to idle sailing, even if I did have a comfortable boat. If I could get to a place where the weather was warm and the breezes steady and where there was a generous sun, I decided I could stand another six months with the greatest of ease.

The Islands! The enchanting tropical Pacific Islands. In the ecstasy of those first few months of cruising in my dream-ship, I had forgotten all about those alluring winterless islands, with their warm, steady trade winds. But now an ocean cruise to them was clearly indicated.

It would have been reasonable to expect that after all these months of cruising my ship would have been ready for almost any trip. But it wasn't. I had been lazy - bone idle - and the *Ngataki* was in much the same condition as she had been when she was launched. The hull was all right; it was sound, watertight and, I hoped, strong. But the rigging was definitely not good enough to take to sea.

The young kauri rika mast was too light up aloft and bent alarmingly in hard winds. So that was the first item on the programme - to get a better mast. I was lucky in this, for when I next visited Charlie he gave me one of the *Rewa's* spars - the fore lower t'gallant yard a huge spar of Baltic pine, 70 feet long and 18 inches through at the middle.

I shall not attempt to describe in detail the lowering of that heavy spar from the giddy heights of the *Rewa's* fore topmast. I will save myself a deal of trouble by saying briefly that after a week's work and after several hair raising escapes it was unfastened and lowered by a complicated system of blocks and tackle into the water. A fortnight's work on it - adzing, planing, scraping and oiling and the result was a first-class mast. The final coat of varnish brought out the beautiful grain of the Baltic pine.

It was a heavy mast, 44 feet long, 10½ inches diameter at the bottom and tapering to 6 inches at the top, but it was not as heavy as the *Teddy's* mast, so I did not worry. I copied the rigging and sail plan of the *Teddy* (a typical

Norwegian pilot boat) as far as I could remember. I had, like her, only two shrouds on each side, both set a little aft of the mast, so there would be no need for backstays. But the shrouds, though few, were heavy. I have never actually measured them, but they are more than five-eighths inches in diameter and each will stand a strain of over 20 tons. I did not expect to have any trouble with *them* parting.

I had never been to sea before, not even in a steamer, so I did not know what to expect, nor how to prepare ship for an ocean crossing. But, I argued, if the rigging is so strong that it *can't* all carry away, it ought to be right.

At the end of two months I was still doing odd jobs around the boat and there still seemed plenty to do. Suddenly I realized that if I did not hurry up it would be too late to make the island trip that year for, after December, the islands are very unhealthy for small boats owing to the prevalence of hurricanes.

That night I thought the problem over and came to the conclusion, after much heavy brain-work, that I was going about it in altogether the wrong way. I found that if you own a boat of any size you can keep working on her indefinitely and there will always be something more to do. The only answer is to set a date for sailing and leave then, ready or not. And so I set a date, September 1st, when *Ngataki* would sail for the Islands. After all, everything of importance was now in order. There was very little more that actually needed doing.

I returned to Auckland and made a few tentative inquiries for a crew. I cannot truthfully say that there were dozens of applications, but in a port so keen on yachting as Auckland there are always a few cheerful souls who will go to sea in anything from a bath-tub up, just for the fun of it. Anyway, there were a few daring - or foolhardy, call it what you like - souls ready to come with me.

Ngataki has four comfortable bunks and four, I think, is the ideal crew for a small boat. It makes the watches even and easy, with three hours on and nine off. There were four of us on the maiden long cruise of the *Ngataki*-Dick Wellington, Sandy Watson, Peter McMahon, and my humble self. The others were young, like myself, and had all done a little cruising around Auckland, so they knew at least as much as I did about ocean cruising.

Dick, in particular, was very keen on the trip. One day, when we were working on the ship and I was doing something up the mast, he pulled back the companion steps and gazed in wonder at my old engine, lying peacefully dormant in the little recess behind the steps.

"Gosh," he said to himself. "I didn't know THAT was there; I bet she's a pretty old timer," and then to me: "Johnny, how's Methuselah?"

"How's the - er - which?" I said, not being very quick in the uptake.

"Methuselah here. She's a pretty old timer, isn't she?"

"Oh, the engine? Yes," I admitted, "she's pretty old - 1904."

"Does she still go?"

"Sometimes. But it is always a matter of some doubt. She goes quite well when you are least expecting it. That's not a bad name - Methuselah - I think we'll call it that. Suits it down to the ground. Yes-we'll call it Methuselah." And so our engine was christened Methuselah.

I realize that I have said very little about the engine, of its installation, of the bent brass rod that was straightened and used for a propeller shaft, of the -. But to say more would be to give away too many secrets. I need merely say that the engine worked - sometimes - and on the rare occasions when it kept going for any length of time it drove the ship (in a flat calm) at a giddy speed of nearly three knots.

It was a happy and energetic foursome that now feverishly worked on the *Ngataki* in a frantic endeavour to get everything ready in time. Although I had thought a week previously that the boat was pretty well ready, I soon discovered that there are thousands of little details that have to be fixed up before a ship goes to sea. To attempt to enumerate them here would be a waste of time, but perhaps the story of the compass is worth recalling.

One day in that last week a friend - George, by name - gave me a compass. He gave it to me because it was, as he said, N.B.G. or words to that effect. As yet I had no compass and I knew that to go ocean cruising you really want one. This one looked all right and I gladly accepted it. I took it back to the boat.

Then I found that, although the card rotated freely, the darned thing wouldn't point anywhere in particular. I mean, the best compasses point approximately to the north; but if you pointed this one to the west, it would quite cheerfully stay there; the same held good for any of the other points painted on its surface. Altogether, not very efficient.

It was not till that evening, when the four of us focused our combined brain power on the thing, that we discovered there was no magnet under the card. I didn't profess to know much about compasses in general, but I did know there ought to be a magnet or something under the compass card.

We fixed a magnet under the card and, lo and behold, it worked!

But, having said this, my conscience (such as it is) begins to trouble me. You may want to know how it was done. You may even have a compass that doesn't point anywhere in particular; I will tell you how it is done.

You dig up an old alarm clock that has long ceased to function and pull a couple of yards of mainspring out of it. If you have a 6 inch card you cut two 5-inch lengths off the spring, straighten them and clean the rust off them. You now make an electro-magnet by bending a length of iron a half inch in circumference into the shape of a horseshoe, winding some insulated wire round it and connecting the ends of the wire to a car battery. You place the length of clock spring across the ends of the iron and, while it is there, you tap it gently with a screwdriver. You pull it away from the iron and there you have a piece of magnetized clock spring a magnet for your compass. You magnetize the other piece of spring and then fix the two pieces one on each

side of the centre underneath your compass card. You put the card back in the bowl and fill the bowl with methylated spirits and water in the proportion of about one to two as (for some obscure reason) you must have alcohol there. You then screw the top on hard, smother axle-grease round the edge to prevent the water leaking out, and you have quite an efficient compass. At least we did.

Next the compass had to be swung. One calm day we swung our compass: we turned the boat round on her anchor. From bearings on shore we obtained, for each direction of the ship, the true course of the ship. From the compass we obtained the compass course of the ship for each of those directions. And so we obtained-we hoped-the deviation of the compass. It was great fun.

And then there was the sextant:

Up to date I knew very little about navigation, but I knew enough to know that to navigate efficiently you must have a sextant. As no sextant was forthcoming, I had to spend what was just about my last 15s. on one. Well, the sextant you can buy for 15s. is hardly likely to be the most accurate of instruments. Mine had been through a fire that had burnt away the case that had once contained it. But the man who sold it to me looked a very conscientious sort of fellow. He said it was a good sextant and, after all, he ought to know. So I bought it.

Besides, I had a business-like look at it first. With a little concentration you could still see most of the scale, the mirrors still had a little silvering on them and when you looked through a hole in one end of the affair you could see a lovely red sun through the hole in the other end of it. I thought it would be all right.

I refused his kind offer to wrap the sextant up for me. I wanted to walk back through the streets of Auckland with the naked instrument in my hand; it would show everybody that I was really a deep-sea sailor. I was inordinately proud of that sextant, for it was the one thing we had on board which raised the *Ngataki* above the level of the ordinary cruising boat. With the sextant on board, we were now an ocean cruiser. I carefully wrapped it up in a - well - an old shirt, and placed it just as carefully in a small locker ... where it remains to this day!

The next item on the agenda was to have the ship surveyed by the Customs and pronounced seaworthy. The Customs people came aboard. First they measured up the ship and worked out her tonnage. I found there was more in this tonnage business than meets the eye. I had always thought the boat weighed about 18 tons, although the newspapers invariably referred to her as a 12 ton cutter. But they worked it out that she was 19.6 Thames measurement, 11.56 gross and 2.02 tons net. After that, if anyone asked me the tonnage of my boat, I would strike an average and say, "Oh, she's just on 16 tons."

The Customs at length completed their survey. The ship was pronounced seaworthy; she was registered at Lloyd's, and I was a proud man. I had built a

boat out of driftwood with my own fair hands that was now a registered British vessel!

But I have squandered too many words on the compass, sextant and survey. If I spend as much time on each of the multitude of small details that we attended to during that last hectic week, this story will run into ten volumes. So I will skip all the rest of the interesting and very necessary preparations and concentrate on the cruise proper.

As there were now only about three months' good cruising weather left, it was decided to go for a three months' cruise.

We decided to visit Sunday Island first (if we could find it), for we had heard that tons of juicy oranges grew wild there. It is a small, uninhabited island about 700 miles from Auckland. From there, God willing, we would go on to Tonga and cruise round there for about a month. We would return to Auckland, perhaps via Norfolk Island, towards the end of November. Dick, who is rather better at figures than I, worked it out that we would cover about 4,000 miles in all. That ought to be a good enough test for the boat - and us.

Our day of departure, Saturday, September 1st, 1934, dawned fine, bright and cold, with a fresh S.W. wind blowing - a fair wind for us to leave Auckland. Early in the morning we sailed in and tied up to a wharf to be handy to town as there was bound to be a last minute rush for all the necessities we had forgotten. There was.

My job was quite definite. I had to get a Bill of Health for Tonga and get the clearance papers fixed up for the trip. It sounded rather complicated and very impressive, but in effect it was really quite simple and it was not long before I was proudly walking back to the *Ngataki* with the ship's papers all in order. They were an exciting novelty to us and we examined them in great detail.

We found, among other things, that "J.W. Wray, master of the Yacht *Ngataki*, of 2.02 tons, a British ship mounted with nil guns, had this day cleared his said vessel according to law." We found, amongst the crew list, that J.W. Wray was the master, D. Wellington was the mate, N. Watson was the cook and P. McMahon the brass-boy. I don't know just where the Customs Officer
got the "brass-boy" idea from, but thinking it over it seemed quite a happy notion. Although the *Ngataki* sported no brass, the addition of a brass-boy to the crew gave the ship, we thought, a bit of tone.

However, to return to our provisioning.

I forget exactly what we bought on that hectic morning. All I remember is that each of us kept arriving at the ship, hot, laden and breathless, to deposit our loads and hurriedly depart again to get something else which had been forgotten, or which we had suddenly decided to be absolutely necessary.

To all this the cynic will probably murmur: "If there was to be so much hurry and bustle on the last day, why didn't the fools make out a complete list and get everything they wanted well before they started?"

We *did* make out a list; we made several lists. In fact, we spent most of our evenings making out lists; and the length of those lists grew and grew and grew until we found it would be quite impossible, from a financial point of view, to get half the things they comprised. So we made a list of only the barest necessities and attended to that. The catch was that on the last day a lot more things seemed suddenly to attach themselves to the "barest necessities".

As usual, we were somewhat troubled by finance. It had been agreed that the other three should share the expenses of the trip between them. This was, we thought, fair enough, as I provided the ship. Besides, l had no money left at all. My world's possessions were my boat and the clothes I stood up in. The expenses of the trip we kept down as low as possible and they totalled £33 15s., or £11 5s. per head, which was pretty reasonable.

Twelve o'clock struck, the time set for our departure. There were still a few things we wanted, but at midday the shops shut, which definitely put a premature end to our shopping.

But now a large crowd of friends, relations and casual observers had gathered at the boat to see us off. We bade a prolonged farewell to them and cast off our mooring lines.

I dived below with hope in my heart to start the engine, as it was rather awkward getting away from the wharfside under sail alone. I had spent most of the previous day working on Methuselah and I believed there was a fair chance of it starting.

It did. I turned the flywheel and the thing started to pop. The crowd cheered loudly and lustily. Methuselah popped about four times and then stopped. The crowd cried "Or - or - orrrrr", or words to that effect. I frantically turned the flywheel and it started to pop again. The crowd cheered again and it was not till the last echoes of applause had died away that Methuselah stopped finally. The audience again gave us the friendly raspberry and wanted an encore. They seemed to know all about Methuselah. But I had had enough. Perspiring, I came on deck. We hoisted the staysail and slowly - very slowly - we drew away from the wharves.

We were away at last!

CHAPTER VII

An Ocean Cruise

Once clear of the wharves, the mainsail was hoisted and, with a fresh S.W. breeze behind us, we made good time down the harbour.

The hurry and bustle and excitement of the last few days had produced their strain and it was pleasantly comforting just to sit round the cockpit and talk and watch the harbour gliding past.

Silently Rangitoto, the grim volcanic pile that guards the entrance to Auckland harbour, slipped past. As we drew further away from the coast, the sea produced by the fresh off-shore wind increased and we were still idly talking on deck when a series of crashes down below reminded us that things were very far from being ship shape below decks.

I scrambled down the hatch just in time to save a bag containing six dozen eggs from leaping off the galley bench. Everywhere, on every bit of available space, were packages. During the last hour in Auckland purchases had come aboard so fast that there had been no time to stow them. A conglomeration of boxes and bags, clothes and parcels, were strewn all over the floor, table, seats, and bunks. I waded through the debris and rescued my best suit that was lying beneath a couple of side-lights from which kerosene was leaking.

I began to stow things away, but had not made much headway before I became acutely conscious of a sinking feeling in my tummy and a hottish, tickly feeling round my Adam's apple. I rushed on deck for some fresh air only just in time.

I told Dick that there were two dozen loaves of bread, 6 pounds of meat and a big bag of peaches lying in his bunk, and he went down and carried on with the stowing.

I am a sadder and wiser man now and I will never again leave the shelter of a harbour before seeing that everything is properly stowed away.

I have found that the art of living on a small boat on a long cruise is not so much a question of laying in a good supply of food as looking after what food you have got and keeping it in good order and condition.

That night, at 6 p.m., we set our watches, three hours on and nine hours

off, with two dog watches between 3 and 6 p.m., so that we would have a different watch each day.

At 7 a.m. the next morning, we passed Motu Hinau, the last island of New Zealand, and at about half-past ten it sank below the horizon behind us.

We were at sea in my home-made boat!

With the aid of a chart, a ruler and set-square, I worked out that the distance to Sunday Island was 670 miles and the course was N.E. by N. So we headed the *Ngataki* on that course - and hoped for the best!

The wind was still fresh from the south-west, a dead run, and, with a jib set on a long sweep as a spinnaker, we averaged six knots. At least I think we averaged six knots. We had, of course, no log. Dick thought we were doing about five knots, but Sandy said we were doing well over seven, Peter thought it was at least eight, and I thought - well, call it six knots and be on the safe side. But we were certainly getting along.

The day was clear and sunny, the wind was fresh and dead behind us. What more can a man ask of the weather? There was only water in sight now, more water and still more water, but the old ship was holding together well and we were happy.

It was a wonderful start to a wonderful cruise.

A little before noon I proudly came on deck with my sextant, and, under the sceptical gaze of the rest of the crew, began to shoot the sun. For a long time I could see nothing although I wobbled the arm of the sextant unmercifully. Suddenly there slid into my line of vision, not one sun, as there ought to be in any right-minded sextant, but *five* of the little beggars! I blinked and looked again. Yes. There were five little red suns dancing on the horizon!

"Come and have a look at this," I said to Dick. "I can see more than one sun through this. See how many you can see."

Dick took over the infernal machine. "I don't see any. Oh - hang on - yes - yes - there they are. There's five of them!"

Sandy had a look. He could see seven.

"Seven!" I exclaimed. This was going from bad to worse. I took over the instrument and had another look. Sure enough there were two more faint ones, high up on the top right-hand corner of the mirror.

Peter had a look, but could not see any, no matter which way he squinted through the hole.

Well now, this was a poser. I had started to study navigation a little, but none of the problems had included that of working out one's position when one saw seven suns in the sextant.

Luckily, we knew our approximate latitude to-day. Auckland was latitude 36° 50'. We had come about 70 miles north, so our latitude now ought to be about 35° 40'. I worked this highly complicated problem backwards and at length found that it was the bottom left-hand sun in the mirror of the sextant that we had to use in our calculations.

Later in the day I made a highly concentrated, but nevertheless

unsuccessful, attempt to find out our longitude. I shot the sun at about 4 p.m. (taking the bottom left-hand sun in the mirror) and worked the problem out exactly the same as a worked example in "Nicholls's Concise Guide to Navigation" (which volume I luckily had) but somehow I could not get the right result. My first two computations put us in the longitude of Italy and the third, a little nearer the mark, put us in the Great Australian Desert. By this time I had developed a severe headache and had twice been seasick, so I gave it up for a while. After all, I reflected, we had our position by dead reckoning. We had been travelling at about six knots on a course N.E. by N. from Auckland; so that we ought to be about 150 miles N.E. by N. of Auckland. That ought to be all right and I came on deck for some fresh air.

"Well," said Dick, "where are we?"

"About 150 miles N.E. by N. of Auckland," I said. "But there's some slight discrepancy in my longitude sight somewhere. I think it must be due to an error in the chronometer."

"It may be," grinned Dick, who owned the "chronometer' - a pocket watch. "We'll have to check it up with the wireless one of these days."

The ship's radio, by the way, was a four-valve set, given to us by Geoff, an old school friend of mine.

It had worked very well in port, but now, for some reason or other, it resolutely refused to function. All I knew about wireless sets was that you turned all the switches in sight, twiddled the dials, and you heard music or something from the loud-speaker. But the speaker of our radio, when all switches had been turned on and dials twiddled, remained unquestionably dumb. Our radio was pronounced to be not in working order.

Sandy drew my attention to a lot of peculiar ribbed clouds high up in the sky. He said he thought they heralded the approach of a storm. Dick also thought they were the warnings of a storm.

Yes? I looked at the clouds with renewed interest. Now it was pointed out to me, they certainly did look rather peculiar. Dashed peculiar. I had never bothered much with clouds before; but now I was to receive my first lesson in foretelling the weather by the cloud formations. Up to date, as I say, I had not studied the weather much; I knew nothing about radios; I knew little, if anything, about navigation. And now, out in the wide Pacific, I suddenly discovered that I knew very little about the handling of small boats on the ocean. The rest of the crew knew, if anything, Jess than I. None of us had ever been out of sight of land before, not even in a steamer.

Again I seem to hear the wiseacres murmuring: "The young fools! Why on earth didn't they take someone who knew something about the game?"

Well, if one wants to go ocean cruising, one must start somewhere. I don't doubt that the best way to start is to go first in a well-found and proved boat in the hands of a man who knows the sea in all its moods. But how often does such an opportunity arise? However, if you first go in your own boat and take your lessons in the hard school of experience, you will learn a great deal about

the sea *very* quickly. If you do not, you will probably not come back.

Take, for instance, the business of navigation. If you are on a boat equipped with a good navigator, during the fine weather you will, if you are keen, take some sights of the sun. You will go down below and, if you feel like it, you will try and work them out. For the first half-dozen attempts you will not succeed and you will probably give it up. Unless you are *very* keen, you will not do any more for a while. Why work yourself silly in a small cabin of the gyrating yacht while the rest of the crew are up on deck enjoying the sun, you argue? So you go up on deck and enjoy the sun, too.

But suppose you are the sole navigato - -however inexperienced - aboard a small boat that has been at sea for a considerable period of time. You are lost. You believe you are somewhere near land, but you don't know just where it lies. The safety of your ship and incidentally, your life, would depend upon your efforts to find out where you were. Would you not peg away surrounded by logarithms, tables, books, pencils and bits of paper? I'll say you would. And if you stayed down there long enough you would probably become an efficient navigator.

And so with me. Although I could not as yet navigate, I felt fairly sure that when we *had* to find land, I would be able to find it. And if we are still charged with being fools for venturing on the wide Pacific in mid-winter in a boat built largely of driftwood and fencing wire, I would like to say in our defence that at least we were prepared against every contingency it was possible to foresee.

Being prepared is more than half the battle in ocean cruising. My boat was as strong as I could make her; the rigging was heavier and stronger than any I had seen on a boat of our size; everything on deck was kept securely lashed down; and we kept our eyes open. We experienced no trouble.

But to return to my attempts at navigation. preferred to attribute my failure to find our longitude to the "chronometer" and there we let the matter drop for the present. There would be plenty more time to find our position.

It was dark again and we were still ploughing along. The wind was in the south now and had increased. We had jibed over, and dropped the spinnaker. At 11 p.m. the wind backed to the east and freshened and we began to plunge along so violently that it was evident we were driving the old *Ngataki* too hard.

An upward heave of a sea helped me out of my bunk. I donned my oilskin, went on deck and helped Sandy, who was on watch, to reef the mainsail. This seemed to ease the ship considerably. I went back to bed and fell asleep.

I awoke, to find Dick vigorously shaking me. "Wake up, Johnny, wake up!" he said. "The weather's getting bad. The mast's working in the cabin-top. Come and look!"

I was instantly awake. The boat was plunging violently. Every now and then she would shudder as a sea broke heavily on the weather bow. With a torch Dick and I examined the mast where it passed through the cabin top. I

could see no sign of any working but, if I had, I would not have been surprised. Somehow you don't have the same faith in a boat you have built yourself. Sandy was trying to tell me the idea that, above the general uproar, he could hear strange squeaking noises like the cabin-top working. Things were not too good and it was high time we did something about it.

But what should we do? Heave-to?

I stuck my head up through the main hatch. Somewhere from the darkness of the cockpit came Peter's voice. "Is that you, Johnny? By heck, she's blowing now, all right!"

I did not doubt him. I had thrust my head up into a wildly confused world; a wet, dark, shrieking, moisture laden world. I could not actually see much, but I could *feel* that things were happening.

The ship was plunging wildly; I could hear the wind whistling through the rigging and could see, by the phosphorescence in the sea, that the lee deck was well under water. A heavy shower of wet spray suddenly descended upon me and hurriedly I descended into the comparative quietness of the cabin.

I had read a lot about heaving to in a storm - from the comfort of an arm-chair at home. There it had sounded quite simple. It *does* sound simple to double reef the mainsail and staysail and then back the staysail to windward.

But I'm afraid the simplicity of the idea did not appeal to us at all that night. Out in that wet, pitch-dark world, it was definitely a different proposition. I certainly had no wish to crawl along the slippery, gyrating deck at that moment. And the idea of trying to do anything with the straining canvas was quite absurd - impossible.

I had never known before that a man could feel so helpless on a boat. Thank goodness, I reflected, it would be a matter of only an hour or so until daylight.

That hour was one of the most anxious and apprehensive hours I have ever spent. Peter remained on deck; Sandy remained calmly in his bunk; while Dick and I, for want of something better to do, were thrown around the cabin as we drew pencil lines on masts, cabin-tops, decks and coamings to see if we could detect any signs of the boat working and falling to pieces.

At long last a grey light in the east heralded the approach of dawn. As soon as it was light enough to see, all hands came on deck and our second and last reef was tied in the mainsail. With a little light on the subject, it was not so difficult.

We then turned to double reefing the staysail and backing it against the mainsail. With some difficulty the staysail was lowered and we began to tie up the points. But while the sail was down on deck the ship seemed to be riding very quietly, so it was left on deck for a while as we watched the *Ngataki* riding the waves.

The wind seemed to have dropped a little, certainly we were not plunging about so much. Then I realized this was due to the fact that we had taken in most of the canvas. She seemed strangely quiet after the violent motion and

mad pitching of the last few hours. The difference was quite astonishing.

Rigged thus, with only the small double-reefed mainsail sheeted hard in, *Ngataki* lay quite steady, with the wind about six points on the bow, gracefully breasting the waves like a duck. And they were some waves, too; huge, grey, rolling hills of water bearing down on us. I had had no idea waves could be so big.

She was riding very easily now. There would be no need for the staysail at all and it was lashed down on deck. A loud banging aft drew our attention to the rudder. Of course, the tiller would have to be lashed. We lashed it well and truly down to leeward.

There seemed nothing else we could do now to help the ship, so we stood around for a while and watched her riding the waves. One by one, the others went below and crawled into their warm bunks, but I remained on deck, fascinated by the spectacle of my ship riding out her first gale.

It was not really my idea of what a gale should be like.

The wind was certainly of gale force and the waves were quite big enough in all conscience, but somehow the old ship was not plunging about enough and things were altogether too dry. I had always pictured a gale at sea as a very terrible thing: I had imagined waves bearing down from all directions, spray flying high over the mast, the vessel almost continually submerged beneath roaring breakers and the crew working desperately to keep the ship afloat.

To my relief I found conditions were not so bad as that. Admittedly each of the huge, rolling monsters seemed about to engulf us as it advanced, but I could readily see that *Ngataki* had no intention of being engulfed. Before each sea she surged forward and upward, struggling to the top; there she would remain for an instant, poised on the crest, as if proudly showing the world she had beaten the great sea, and then she would gracefully slide down into the next trough and the sea would rush off, beaten, to leeward.

After an hour's watching I was satisfied that there was nothing I could do to help the ship in her fight. She was quite capable of looking after herself. So I, also, returned to the warm comfort of my bunk.

It would have gratified my sense of the dramatic to have been able to paint a vivid picture of the fight we made to keep our vessel afloat. But to do so would be no more than colourful romancing and my conscience, such as it is, would very properly protest. No, if anyone had stuck his head into the *Ngataki's* cabin an hour later (not that we were expecting anyone), he would have gazed upon the comforting scene of four hardy mariners peacefully asleep.

Towards evening I climbed out of my bunk again. The barometer was down to 29.56. The wind screamed even louder in the rigging and the waves were breaking fairly frequently near us. From the shelter of the main hatch I could see every now and then a huge breaking comber roar past, perhaps fifty yards away. They seemed to be all around us, but so far none had hit us. What

would happen if one *did* hit us?

They certainly did not look too healthy and I descended and held a council of war with the crew.

"Aren't you supposed to pour oil on the water when it gets too rough?" asked Dick. "Have you got any old oil, Johnny?"

Of course! Charlie *had* given me a couple of heavy canvas oil bags. We would fill them up and put them out.

But where were they? Where *had* I put the blasted things? I searched for them. We all searched for them. The inside of the ship was in a chaotic mess and it was getting dark by the time we had found them, snugly hidden away beneath everything else in the stern locker.

It was a lesson to me always to keep storm gear handy.

With this lesson still fresh in my memory I pulled the lifebelt with the pilot light fixed to it from underneath the sacks of vegetables in the for'ard cabin and lashed it on deck aft. Little use it would be in an emergency bidden away in the for'ard cabin.

We descended into the galley and I dug up a 2 gallon tin of old lubricating oil-crankcase drainings from my father's launch. I poured the oil while Dick held the bag open. It was nearly full when we discovered a slimy black stream spreading all over the galley floor. We examined the bag and saw the oil pouring through a small hole that I had not previously noticed. Quickly we tried to pour the oil back in the tin, but the *Ngataki* had resumed her plunging and most of the oil missed the tin and distributed itself over the floor and over us.

We cleaned it up as best we could with newspapers and then started on the other bag. This time I examined it first and it seemed all right. We poured about half a gallon of oil into it, seized the top and tied it to a length of inch rope.

Triumphantly I went on deck. "Now we'll teach those dashed waves to bark at us!" And I threw the bag at them, into the water to windward of us.

But a small wave, with the help of the whistling wind, threw it back at us, and it landed in the sail, where it left a juicy, black stain - a stain that is still faintly visible to-day.

We tied a foot length of railway iron to the bag, and this time it disappeared straight down below us. Obviously it was no use there. We hauled it up again, took off the heavy iron, and tied a small lead sinker to it. This time it stayed in the water, a little below the surface, and soon it was well out to windward of us.

We stayed a while to watch the oil bag smooth out the seas, but it did not seem to make very much difference. In fact, to be quite candid, I could not see the slightest difference in the surface of the water. But the light was failing fast and it *might* have been a little smoother. Anyway, the moral effect was there.

We rubbed as much oil off us as possible with newspaper and climbed

back into our bunks. I read for a little while.

No breakers hit us. The oil might be doing some good out there.

The bunk was wonderfully comfortable. It was remarkable to me to think that only an inch and a half of kauri planking separated my cosy bunk from the wet, black, howling fury outside.

At about one o'clock in the morning we were all awakened by the thunderous crash of a big sea breaking heavily on deck. The ship shuddered and heeled over drunkenly. Pots and pans clattered about in the galley. The dinghy rumbled along the deck - it must have broken loose.

I clambered out and hurriedly went on deck with a torch. The sea had slewed us completely round and we were now hove-to on the other tack. The 2 inch ropes that had lashed the dinghy had parted. The sea must have broken on us pretty heavily! I renewed the lashing and quickly dived below again.

The barometer had fallen to 29.38.

We talked for a while, listened to the storm and at length went to sleep again.

The next morning we awoke to find conditions much the same. It was certainly not easing off at all.

Our double-reefed mainsail was standing up to it very well. It never shook and it always kept the boat quite steady. It was small (only 80 square feet) and heavy, and I was very glad I had selected such heavy canvas. It was made of Gourock No. 2 storm canvas. Had it been any lighter, I doubt if it would have stood up to the heavy strain imposed upon it during those first few days.

The oil bag was hauled in. There was no trace of any oil in it now and it looked as though a litter of healthy lion cubs had been toying with it. For some unknown reason the edges were badly chafed, but it would still hold oil. We filled it up and put it out again. Then we went to sleep.

We slept all that day and that night.

That evening I again wrestled with the radio to see if could get a time signal. I turned on all the switches, twisted the dials and thoughtfully tapped the panel with a screwdriver in the hope that something might happen. But, beyond a few groans, I could get nothing out of it.

I should remind those of you who are used to the unfailing efficiency of modern sets that our apparatus was one of the real old-time outfits that have a soul and a personality. You have to go about working them very carefully if you are not to hurt their feelings.

Crash-shhhh! A sea broke on us and the ship was thrown bodily to leeward in a smother of foam and spume. Sandy, who was in the act of getting out of his bunk, was thrown forcibly across the cabin and fetched up violently on top of me and the radio. I opened my mouth to curse him when the radio, instead of moaning gently, began suddenly to scream blue murder. I stopped in mid-curse and twiddled the dial again. The speaker gave a couple of staccato barks, a few sobs, and then, wonder of wonders, there came to us a man's voice telling us that the market for fat porkers was still firm.

We were not interested in porkers, fat or thin, yet we listened with bated breath, not daring to touch the set in case it gave up the struggle again. And, for our patience, we were rewarded, for a little later we received a time signal.

Our "chronometer" was sixteen minutes slow!

The next morning we awoke and were relieved to find the wind had backed to the north and had eased a little, enabling us to get under way with a single reefed mainsail and staysail, on a course about east.

We had successfully weathered our first storm!

My ship had shown herself to be quite capable and very comfortable in heavy weather.

To the doubting Thomases among my readers who probably think I have over-estimated the heaviness of the weather, I suggest that they check up my statements. Since the date of our departure was September 1st, 1934, the days we were hove-to would be September 3rd and 4th. I invite them to check up the logs of steamers near Auckland at that time. Among them you will find that the *Marama*, a Royal Mail ship of 14,000 tons, arrived at Auckland on September 5th, two days late. She reported lifeboats smashed in very heavy weather off the New Zealand coast; she was completely hove-to for over a day. We heard about it at great length when we arrived back in New Zealand.

It was a relief to be sailing again, after being hove-to for over two days. Besides, if we had remained hove-to much longer we should all have developed bed sores!

The wind backed rapidly to the west and then to the south-west. The sheets were eased and we began to run before it again. The wind freshened, the seas grew bigger and we ran before them faster and faster.

That night we altered course two points more north, to bring the wind slightly on the quarter and so minimize the danger of a gybe. I wanted to stick to our original course - it would be easier to find land if my navigation failed - but the boys said no, it was too tricky steering. They were quite right. Besides, as Dick very reasonably pointed out, a couple of points off our course would not make any difference as we were probably not heading anywhere in particular.

The *Ngataki* rushed madly on through the night. We were able to sleep very little, for the motion of the boat was altogether too violent. Our stern would lift to an approaching sea, there would be a moment's silence, and then we would rush down its back with our bow-wave roaring while the helmsman braced himself and put all his weight into the tiller to keep the boat more or less on her course. Three hours at the helm under these conditions was a good night's work. I remember that it was with the greatest satisfaction that I handed over the kicking tiller to Sandy at midnight.

"She's steering a bit wild," I yelled, "but for Pete's sake don't let her gybe. We may lose the stick if she gybes now!"

If I had known as much about the game then as I know now, I would have run before it that night under staysail alone. But at the time I never thought of

it. All my thoughts were concentrated on preventing a gybe and keeping more or less on our course. Had I thought about it at all, I must have seen that the best way of avoiding a gybe was to lower the mainsail and hoist the staysail. It was nearly as big as the reefed mainsail, and under it we would have travelled practically as fast and much more comfortably.

The morning found us still rushing along under reefed mainsail. A battleship had nothing on us for speed now. We were doing twelve knots according to Peter, eleven according to Sandy, and nine according to Dick and me. But even nine was far too much for our tubby little craft. However, there did not seem to be too much strain on any of the gear, and we were certainly getting somewhere, so we carried on.

During the next two days the wind gradually eased. I was feeling quite fit again and I renewed my navigational efforts.

During the two days we were hove-to I had been feeling, if not exactly sea-sick, very like something the cat has brought in - only about ten per cent the hardy mariner, if you know what I mean. Dick and Sandy maintained they felt grand all the time, but I think it is significant that it was not for some days that we cooked our first real meal on the stove.

But now we were all one hundred per cent again. Which could readily be seen by the laughing and shouting that went on during our first swim, or rather, our first tow through the water at a rope's end.

The swim refreshed us immensely and from then on life went on very smoothly aboard the *Ngataki*. The wind remained light but fair and we made steady progress.

During the fine weather most of my time was spent on navigating. I was progressing very well. All my sights now gave us positions somewhere in the Pacific and most of them put us from 400 to 500 miles N.E. of Auckland. It was quite possible that we *were* thereabouts. Moreover, all my sights on one day had yielded positions within 50 miles of each other. So you could say I was progressing in leaps and bounds.

On September 12th we were eleven days out from Auckland. The weather was perfect. The sun was warm, the sky clear and the breeze light from the south. The Pacific Ocean was sparkling blue and the *Ngataki* was sliding over it at a modest four knots. In short, everything was very pleasant. Dick was dreamily steering with a vacant eye on the compass, while Sandy, Peter and I were lying naked on the warm deck, absorbing the ultra-violets.

"It's about time we were sighting land now, isn't it?" said Dick, "we're eleven days out now."

"Oh, no," I said lazily, "by the sight this morning we're still over a hundred miles off. We may sight it to morrow."

We lapsed again into a species of trance.

A little later I summoned sufficient energy to go below to get the sextant.

It was time for a longitude sight.

I took up my usual position on the cabin-top, leaning against the mast. I

had no excuse to-day for not getting good results. The sun was clear, the horizon was good and the boat was steady. I brought the lowest of the seven suns down to the horizon.

But... that was a funny horizon! What--? Was it--? I took the sextant away and looked.

It was! Undoubtedly there was a distant hill-top way down on the horizon. I said nothing for a while, but my heart beat wildly. I glanced around. The rest of the crew were still peacefully sun-bathing. I went below and pretended to work out my sights. The boys had not yet noticed the triumphant look and the smiles that I could not hide.

I looked up the *Pilot Book*. That was probably Macauley Island, a small island in the Kermadec group, about 80 miles from Sunday Island.

"By jove!" I called out, "that last sight of mine puts us about 25 miles off Macauley Island. You ought to be able to see it now."

"Yes?" very lazily.

I came up and stood on the cabin-top. I shaded my eyes and looked at the horizon.

"Yes! There she is, gentlemen. Macauley Island, all right. That's good navigating, eh?"

The troops were very much wide awake now.

"Land ho! Land ho!" For a while excitement reigned on the *Ngataki*. After eleven long days at sea, the sight of land can be mighty comforting, even if it is no more than a glimpse of a small hill-top away on the distant horizon.

We were all too busy congratulating each other and shaking each other's hands to remember that a few short minutes ago we were over a hundred miles off land and now we were suddenly within thirty miles of it.

The island was slightly aft of our beam; it must have been in sight all day. If I had not shot the sun then we should probably never have noticed it.

That night we altered course a couple of points so as to converge on Sunday Island and at daybreak the next morning the dim outline of the island was visible about 30 miles ahead.

About noon we came up with it. From a distance the place did not look very inviting. It seemed to consist entirely of high desolate cliffs that dropped straight down into the water. But, as we approached, small patches of flat ground, covered profusely with sub-tropical vegetation, in which banana palms seemed to predominate, became visible. We cruised up and down the northern coast for a while, and finally dropped anchor off a beach which seemed to promise the best landing.

So this was Sunday Island; romantic Sunday Island that I had heard so much about during the last few years. Back in Auckland I had heard endless tales of this isolated island; numerous acquaintances had spoken at great length about it, but I had never met anyone who had seen the place.

There had been a few attempts at settling there, but they had all ended more or less disastrously. Disease and death, earthquake and fire (for the

island was volcanic) had taken their toll. In 1861, according to the *Pilot Book*, a slaver bound for Callao came to the island. The ship was crowded with Tokerau natives, amongst whom a disease of the typhoid nature had broken out. They had sailed from place to place and everywhere, owing to their sickness, the authorities had refused them admittance, sometimes by force. It seemed they were all doomed to sail to a slow death on the high seas. Then they found their way to Sunday Island. The pitiful human freight was landed and the skipper and a few hands sailed away. The natives spread the disease to the few settlers and very soon they all died.

Some of the greatest ocean depths in the world are off Sunday Island. The island is a mere pin point showing above the sea of a huge submarine mountain, a mountain mightier even than Mount Everest, for its peak is 32,720 feet above the ocean floor. This, together with the thermal activity, makes the island, I suppose, a trifle unstable; in fact, rather a wobbly proposition. It is hardly to be wondered that the settlers, unable to get away when the band begins to play and the island starts to rock, get the wind up rather vertically. Looking at those grim precipitous cliffs towering above us, I could not say I blamed them.

I could tell a lot more about the place and the attempts at settling on it, but I admit it would all be copied from the *Pacific Islands Year Book*, the *P.I. Monthly*, or the *Pilot Book*. So, if you are still interested, I refer you to those very interesting volumes.

Not even the roar of the heavy surf breaking on the beach could now dampen our enthusiasm to get ashore. Sandy, Dick and I put off in the 8 foot dinghy. We lashed the rowlocks in place, for we did not expect to get ashore without a capsize. In this we were not disappointed. We had barely reached the shallower water when a huge Pacific roller welled up behind. It mounted higher and higher and broke with a roar right on cop of the dinghy, sending us floundering into the water. It took the three of us over a quarter of an hour of hard swimming and towing to get the sunken dinghy up the beach against the heavy undertow.

At length, however, we reached dry sand and lay down for a while, panting. The undertow had been far stronger than we had imagined. We lay for a while in the soft warm sand before Sandy rose to his feet, as naked as the day he was born - it was quite useless wearing any clothes through the surf - and proclaimed the island to belong to His Majesty King George. This despite the fact that it had been claimed by Britain about forty-eight years previous. Sandy wanted to make sure of it.

On the beach we were greeted by a dozen or so goats, who looked at us with undisguised curiosity. As far as we knew it was ten years since any human beings had set foot on the island and the goats were probably wondering what strange beasts these were that suddenly intruded on their domain.

No time was lost in exploring, but we did not get very far for we found an

orange tree that yielded the most delicious fruit. And there our exploring ceased. We settled down to the steady work of consuming as many oranges as possible in the given time. We did not do so badly. For every orange we ate we laid aside a pip; afterwards we counted them. Inside of two hours Dick had surrounded twenty-six oranges, I came next with twenty-three and Sandy came last with nineteen to his credit - but Sandy had done most of the talking. Unanimously we decided that Sunday Island was the best island in the Pacific, since nowhere else could it be possible to find more luscious oranges.

The crew of the *Ngataki* would have made a perfect picture seated in the nude beneath orange trees and palms, with multitudes of beautiful tame bell-birds and tuis fitting about in the green branches overhead. Back to nature and all that.

But all good things must come to an end, and soon the failing light warned us it was time to be getting back to the ship. The tide was now out and the surf did not look so bad. Nevertheless our first attempt proved absolutely futile and showed we would have no hope of getting out with three of us in the dinghy. So, awaiting my chance, I rowed out alone and successfully got through the surf. Then Dick and Sandy swam out and climbed into the boat outside the line of breakers.

After tea that night we had about an hour's fishing - slaughter would be a better word. The fish came up just as quickly as we liked to haul them in. We had no bait and so we tried, among other things, rag, orange peel and soap. With a small chunk of common household soap we caught our first fish. This fish we cut up for bait and after that everything was easy. In these virgin waters the fish are hopelessly uneducated; they do not seem to know what a hook is for. They were mostly about the size of kahawai and were of a striking electric blue colour. They were entirely new to us, but they proved excellent eating, which was, from our mundane viewpoint, the main thing.

Sandy had hooked one of these chaps, when a large grey fish appeared, swallowed the blue fish and went off with the line. It took us nearly an hour to play the monster until we had worked him close enough to put three expanding bullets from a .303 rifle into him. It was a hapuka - the biggest I had ever seen. It took two of us on the staysail halyard to get him on board. We cut about 200 pounds of steaks off it, which we cooked and bottled in vinegar. This kept us in fish for the next fortnight or so.

That night we maintained an anchor watch, for there was no shelter where we were lying - we might just as well have been anchored in the middle of the Pacific. We tried out a little dodge which we have often used since when lying in a dangerous anchorage.

Our main anchor consisted of a 100 pound pick, on 20 fathoms of half inch chain. Besides this, we put out a light 30 pound pick, on a slack warp which was not fastened to the ship at all. The warp came down the for'ard hatch and was tied to a kerosene tin in the for'ard cabin. Thus, if anything happened to the main anchor, the weight would come on the lighter one, the

warp would tighten and would yank the tin round the cabin. A most effective alarm.

About a year later we owed the life of the ship to this idea. We had put out the "anchor alarm" and had all turned in after a heavy day. Sometime during the night we were awakened by the tin banging around the for'ard cabin. Investigation revealed that the wind had come on during the night, our chain had caught on some coral and had parted on a swell, and we were drifting on to a dangerous breaking reef. Thanks to our banging kerosene tin we had enough time to hoist sail and get away. Since then I have never failed to use the "anchor alarm" when in a precarious anchorage.

As with so many other beautiful islands in the Pacific, the lack of a quiet anchorage is one of the biggest catches to Sunday Island. Once ashore, it is perfect. It is very fertile and practically any tropical or sub-tropical plant will grow well in the rich, volcanic soil. The climate is mild and pleasant - never too hot, never too cold. There is a super abundance of vegetables and fruit, fish and meat. We saw no signs of the thermal activity that we had heard so much about, but perhaps it was just lying dormant, ready to burst out again when the next *bona_fide* settlers arrived.

The next morning we found a better landing place about a mile along the coast, where some rocks projected well out into deep water. Here it was comparatively easy to jump from the dinghy on to the rocks on the top of a surge and on the next surge to haul the dinghy up after us. To be sure the dinghy received a severe buffeting before it was finally drawn away from the angry, swirling waters, but we could not help that. Here, also, we landed a rifle and a camera.

The day was spent in eating oranges, exploring, and eating more oranges.

We found, among other interesting things, the remains of an old thatched hut that bore evidence of people having once led a very primitive, Robinson Crusoe existence. There were the remains of an ingenious grindstone, made from a stone off the beach and some pohutukawa limbs. Not far off were two old graves. What tragedy, we wondered, had resulted in the erection of those two crude crosses?

We commenced an organized hunt for bananas. But the palms that we had seen from the ship were not banana palms and after an hour's searching it was evident that we were going to be banana-less.

All too soon the day passed and, laden with oranges, we made our way back to the ship.

The next day we were preparing to get under way when someone suddenly discovered it was Friday. Well, of course, it is against all the traditions of the sea to leave on a Friday, so not unwillingly, we went ashore again, collected some more oranges and shot a couple of goats, which provided a welcome change from our canned meat on the *Ngataki*. That night we had roast goat for tea. It was delicious.

On Saturday we left with a fair southerly wind. About noon Sunday Island

had disappeared below the horizon behind us and once more we settled down to our nautical routine.

On Sunday we picked up what was apparently the beginning of the S.E. trade wind, light at first, but gradually freshening, until on Monday we were doing six knots.

This was ideal sailing. There was enough life in the old ship to make her a real pleasure to steer, yet the motion was not sufficiently violent to make conditions uncomfortable below decks. The weather was getting warmer, the sky clear, the sea sparkling blue and the breeze was steady on the quarter. Our sails were drawing steadily and the *Ngataki* was ploughing bravely along.

My dreams had come true! This is what I had dreamt of during the dark days back in a city office. It was a perfect life!

The continual roar of the bow-wave was a song of joy, proclaiming our speed towards the alluring tropics. No wonder they called these the "Trade Winds".

On Wednesday I proved, I think, my navigating abilities beyond doubt. Up till then the crew were still inclined to be sceptical about my navigating. They were inclined to look on the finding of Sunday Island as a fluke, on the grounds that one has only to cruise in the Pacific long enough to strike some land somewhere.

But on Wednesday I showed them! In the afternoon my sights showed we were getting close to Ata, a high, uninhabited island about 80 miles from Tongatabu. If we carried on at this speed, we ought to sight it about 6 p.m.

And behold! On climbing the mast at 6 p.m., the tops of two mountains were just discernible in front of the rays of the setting sun, about 40 miles away on the port bow.

I was very proud of myself. Who wouldn't be?

Mind you, I am not saying that it might not have been another fluke, but I preferred to think that I was getting the strangle-hold on this navigation.

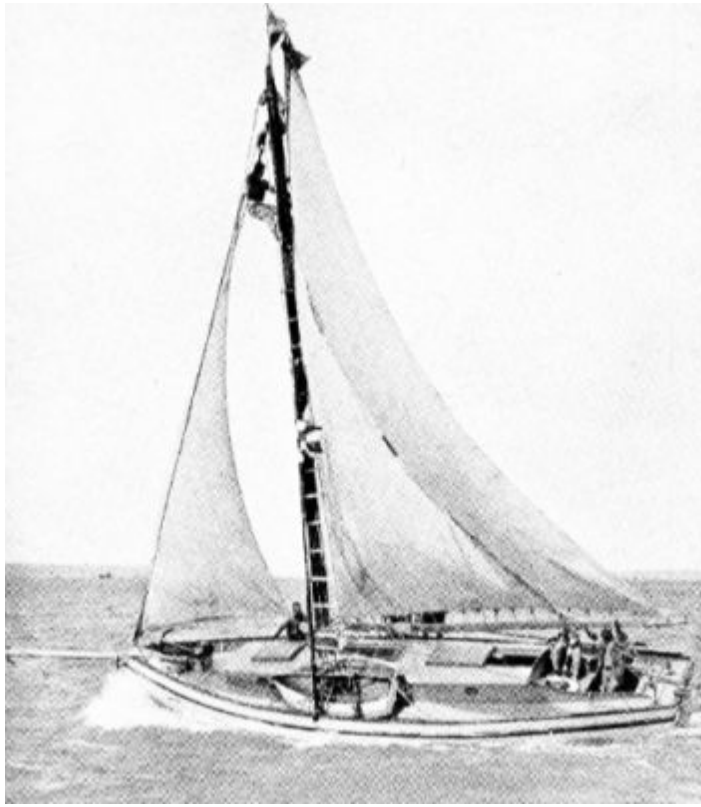
At daybreak the next morning, Thursday the 20th, Eua, an island only 10 miles from Tongatabu, was visible about 30 miles ahead.

Here we ran into a large school of whales playing in the water. At least, I think they were playing; but they might have been having fits. Their antics consisted chiefly of sticking their enormous tails out of the water, waving them frantically around and thrashing the water into foam.

Viewed from the safety of terra firma, their activities would undoubtedly have been highly interesting; but from the deck of the *Ngataki* the monsters were far too playful, far too big, and, more than anything else, far too close to make us feel anything but highly apprehensive. Once or twice a huge tail suddenly appeared but 30 yards away and disappeared again with a tremendous splash. It was a matter of some concern in wondering just where the next one would come up. Altogether we were glad when we finally left them.

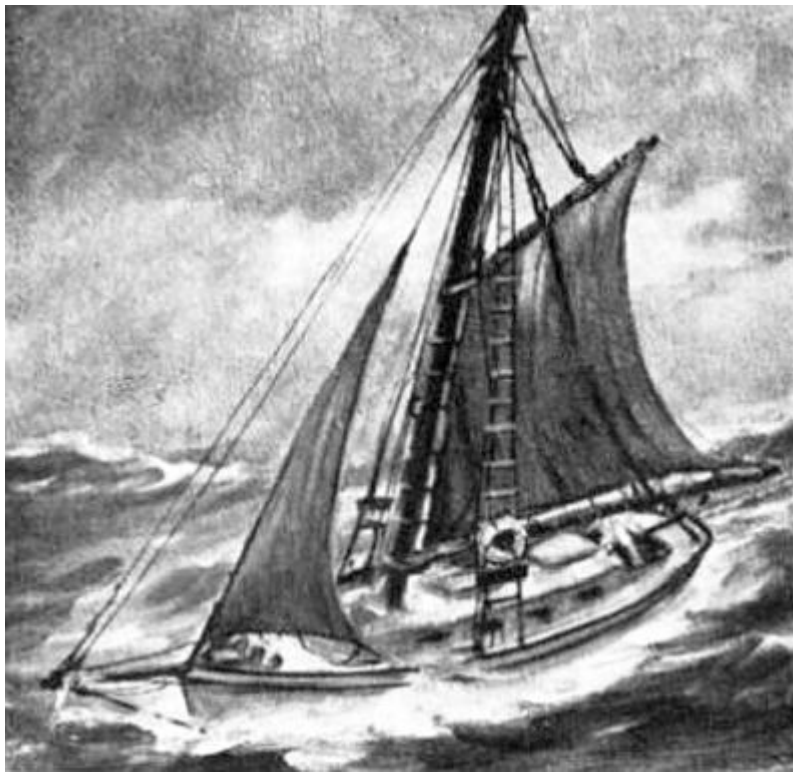
On approaching Eua, the crew had their first glimpse of green coconut

palms and coral, glistening snowy white in the bright sunlight. Our spirits rose-this looked something like the islands we had heard so much about.



Ngataki at the Start of the Tasman Race

The Crew of the Ngataki



Ngataki Running Before a Gale

CHAPTER VIII

The Islands

IT was getting on in the afternoon and we did not want to make Nukualofa that day. It would have meant picking our way through the coral reefs with the sun in our eyes-not the best method of attack. With the sun behind us, as it would be in the morning, the coral patches would be visible from some distance off and we would have a better chance of keeping to the long narrow channel which, according to the chart, marked the entrance to the harbour.

During the afternoon we, therefore, hove-to in the lee of Eua - it was far too deep to anchor - and gave the ship a general spring-cleaning, in preparation for entering our first civilized port.

We remained hove-to until about 3 a.m. the next morning, when the ship's nose was pointed towards Muihobohobonga (what a mouthful!), a headland that marked the entrance to the Biha Passage. At daybreak the headland was visible ahead and about 7 a.m. we reached it and began to skirt along the coast of Tongatabu.

Here the crew had their first shave for twenty-two days and, judging from the rather profane comments that passed concerning the bluntness of razors and the toughness of whiskers, the process was anything but an enjoyable one. We found that the facial shrubbery thrives well on salt water. It gets wonderfully strong and tough and defies the sharpest razor.

Here also, the last few loaves of Auckland bread, now twenty-two days old, were dumped; it being the general opinion of the crew that the thick and complicated fungous growths that the bread had developed were harmful to the system.

We entered the Biha Passage and the coral reefs began to converge on each side of us as the passage narrowed. The helmsman was directed by shouted instructions from the masthead, from which the edge of the coral was plainly visible.

We sailed along parallel with the coast, which was about a mile away. And all along that coastline we heard the booming of countless drums. They made us a little apprehensive. Surely they could not be war drums, for these were the Friendly Isles. Perhaps they were signalling each other, spreading the alarm that a strange ship was approaching. As we sailed on the drums

continued to boom and we continued to wonder.

A little over an hour later (for the channel is 7 miles long) the passage began to widen and we found ourselves in the calm waters of Nukualofa Harbour.

But Nukualofa was still many miles away. The landmark on which we now had to steer was, according to the *Pilot Book*, Mount Zion, which ought to be about west of us. To the west of us, however, there was no sign of any mountain. That was peculiar. A dashed mountain only 8 miles away ought to have been easily visible, for nowhere else was the land more than 10 feet high. On making inquiries later, we found that pine trees had grown up around Mount Zion, effectively concealing it. Mount Zion was only 50 feet high! But it shows the flatness of the place, when they call a 50 feet hillock a mountain.

Here we saw our first boat since leaving Auckland, an island cutter which, on sighting us, immediately hoisted sail and accompanied us up the harbour. We were joined by other craft, all manned, or rather crowded out, with numbers of laughing Tongan boys, who sailed along with us, shouting in their language and throwing us hot kumaras and yams. There was certainly nothing warlike about these natives.

Just on 9 a.m. the ship was rounded up off Nukualofa wharf. We made fast to a large mooring buoy and waited for the Port Doctor, who soon came out in a launch. He made us very welcome on hearing we came from Auckland, which proved to be his home town. We asked him about the drums and he laughed.

"They're not drums," he said. "That's the natives making Tapa, the native cloth. They beat it out of the bark of a tree and make a hell of a row about it."

As soon as he left us, we were besieged with interested visitors and for the next few hours there was very little standing room on the *Ngataki*.

It was the first time that any of us had been in a foreign port, and we were not quite sure just what exactly was the correct procedure. But a visit to the British Consul seemed clearly indicated. So that morning four rather timid-looking New Zealand yachtsmen paid a visit to the British Consul of the Friendly Isles.

The Consul was a good sort and very soon put us at our ease. He did more. He told us a lot about the customs of the natives and finished up by inviting us to a dance to be held at the Nukualofa Club that evening.

That night the timid yachtsmen were timid no longer. We sampled our first taste of Island life as we had always imagined it to be. A life that revolved around quiet coral lagoons, dimly lit, highly decorated dance halls, inexhaustible supplies of free beer, snappy string-bands, and fair women - well, not too fair, perhaps, yet very attractive and always laughing gaily.

I have dim recollections of Sandy helping the string band out with tenor solos (Sandy was by far the worst singer on the boat), and Dick doing a pathetic, but highly amusing, hula in the middle of the floor. A quiet walk, not unaccompanied, beneath the gently rustling coconut palms and the warm

tropical moon; then back to the Club again. And through it all there permeated the warm sensuous night air, laden with heavy perfumes of the myriad flowers of the alluring tropics.

The crew of the *Ngataki* made the most of it. I think we all enjoyed the romance of that night.

But perhaps I had better stop. This is not ocean cruising.

Yet, upon consideration, it seems to go very well with ocean cruising, especially if it happens to be the first night ashore after three weeks at sea.

There were no clocks or time-pieces of any sort present at that first dance of ours, so it was not until the grey light of dawn penetrated our dulling wits that we realized the evening might be drawing on and that it was time we were thinking of turning in. We learned later that throughout the South Seas there are very few clocks in evidence. No one knows what the time is. No one cares.

During the dance we met practically all the white people in Tonga and, from then on, our stay was marked by a succession of motor trips to outlying villages in the country, picnics to small coral islands and fishing excursions - generally fruitless, yet very enjoyable.

On our fourth day in Nukualofa the banana steamer came into port. She brought us mail from New Zealand. It was then we heard of the damage done to steamers by the storm we had encountered off the New Zealand coast and it was not until then that we realized that the storm had been pretty severe. We felt very proud of ourselves for having weathered it so successfully.

I received also an interesting letter stating that there was to be a yacht race from Auckland to Melbourne, to be run in conjunction with the Melbourne Centenary Celebrations. It would start on December 8th. There were about eight entries. Would I enter my ship? Certainly I would. I immediately replied, saying I would be ready to start on December 8th.

This meant we would have to be back in Auckland by the 1st of December at the latest.

When the steamer had gone she left tons of bananas on the wharf, the result of packing hundreds of cases in excess of the quota allowed for New Zealand. Some of these were sold at the ridiculously low price of six cases for a shilling. Needless to say we availed ourselves of the opportunity and obtained about 300 pounds of the best bananas for ninepence.

We spent many pleasant days in Nukualofa. At the end of the first week it seemed we had been there for years. We soon learnt a smattering of the language and could now greet natives in their own tongue. Everywhere we went we said "malo lelei" (good-day), which was always answered by a smiling, "lo, malo lelei." The natives seemed always to be smiling and laughing. No wonder Cook gave them the name - The Friendly Isles.

One thing that interested us particularly was the Tongan singing. Once heard it could never be forgotten. It was always taken in four parts, which would approximate to bass, tenor, soprano and super-soprano. Although we

could never detect any sign of a tune, their voices seemed to blend into one harmonious dirge, which would keep on for hour after hour, the tenor having a rest while the bass carried on, and so on.

Once I was privileged to be present at some rare sort of religious meeting in an outlying village. I sat on the floor, cross-legged, like the rest of them, next to the bass singers, with my back against the wall. I will never forget how the wall vibrated when the bass gave her the gas and started in with a roar.

It was the ambition of the basses, it appeared, to make enough noise to drown the soprano section, which consisted of young girls firing on all tonsils and making a noise not unlike a brigade of healthy fire engines in action. But from the start it was evident that they had no hope-they could easily have drowned a battery of artillery in action, but they had no hope against the sopranos. I rather expected the girls' gills to blow out under the strain, or the roof to collapse; but they seemed to know just how far they could go without causing any damage.

The whole, as can readily be imagined, produced a roar in which volume of noise held priority over harmony. Nevertheless harmony was distinctly present, although it was more noticeable from a distance of about 2 miles. Under such conditions the affair sounded like a harmonious drone, spasmodically growing in volume and dying away again.

Luckily we had set a date for sailing from Nukualofa, or we would probably never have left the place. After a very pleasant stay of ten days, our sailing date, the 1st of October, arrived.

Having said good-bye to our many Nukualofa friends at great length, we hoisted sail, and with a fresh trade wind, quickly drew away from the wharf, bound for Neiafu, in the Vavau group.

The *Ngataki* was headed for a speck on the horizon which, on approaching, proved to be the wreck of a large steamer with her bow high up on the fringing reef and her stern well under water. It was a grim sentinel marking the opening in the reef, or rather, the coral on the edge of the opening.

Having cleared this we headed N. by E., which was our course for Vavau, and with a steady wind we averaged about six knots. Once more we felt the throb of the mighty Pacific and with a thrill realized we were again at sea. We cut cards for watches and settled down once more to ship-board routine.

The following morning found us off Kao, a small island less than 2 miles in diameter, which rises in the centre to a perfect cone of 3,380 feet high. The next day we were close to Late Island, another volcanic eminence.

The breeze, which had been rapidly failing, dropped right away to a flat calm, and we were left floundering about on the surface of the ocean. The sails were lowered to prevent chafe and we proceeded to take life easy.

For the next two days there was not a breath of wind, but we did not mind. The time was spent alternately swimming and basking in the warm sun. Up to

date we had seen no sign of sharks and, according to reports in Nukualofa, the brutes were fairly scarce in Tonga; nevertheless we generally kept a rifle handy and a good watch was maintained when someone was swimming.

On our fourth day out there came a light breeze and by daybreak the next morning we had reached the outlying islands of the Vavau Group. The Group consists of the main island, Vavau, which presents a very irregular coastline, and a large number of smaller islands through which we had to thread our way to reach our objective.

Soon we were out of sight of the open sea and were surrounded on all sides by small islands, all of which looked very inviting, with the rising sun lighting up their snowy white beaches and with their green coconut palms gently waving over the thick tropical vegetation.

Here it would not be hard for the stranger to lose his way, for all the islands look exactly alike. However, with the help of the *Pilot Book* and with much debating as to which island was which, we managed to thread our way through them and found ourselves at the entrance to the main harbour.

This harbour, I think, must be the best and prettiest in the Pacific. As we slowly sailed up it surpassingly beautiful views were unfolded before us. Here and there, mostly hidden by the luxuriant green foliage, we caught glimpses of small, brown Tongan huts. Occasionally there came to us over the clear water snatches of native songs, generally sung to the accompaniment of guitars. The voices sounded very sweet and we wondered if their owners were just as sweet. We would have to investigate.

It was a wonderful cruising ground. Months could easily be spent cruising around all those little islands we had just passed.

We sailed on, looking for Neiafu, until it seemed we had come too far. We were about to turn round and look in some other direction when, from the masthead, a small opening showed up ahead. We sailed through this and a surprisingly large harbour opened out before us in which the few white houses and wharf unmistakably showed this was Neiafu.

It was, we found, many years since the last Auckland boat called and, as most of the residents were Aucklanders, they were very pleased to see us. Invitations to homes and functions poured in and it was but a few days before the crew knew all the whites in Neiafu, who by the way, number only about twenty.

We were taken all over the island by launch and car and saw many interesting and beautiful sights. One, in particular, worthy of mention was a launch excursion to a remarkable system of caves, known as the Swallows' Caves, situated on the island of Kapa, one of the outlying islands we had passed.

The main cave has very deep, clear water in it and is quite large - I think *Ngataki* could have sailed into it. Arriving late in the afternoon, when the sun is shining directly into it, one is greeted by a truly wonderful sight as the sun, reflected off the water, produces all the rippling colours of the rainbow on the

peculiar formations on the roof of the cave.

We donned water-glasses, which enabled us to see quite clearly under water, and dived down. A fathom or so below the surface, I clung to a piece of projecting coral and glanced around me. It was just as if I had entered another world - a world that seemed to have gone mad on bright colours. There were incredible rock gardens, produced by delicately-hued coral formations, and swimming idly around them were small, vividly coloured fish of the most fantastic shapes. It was a remarkable scene. At the entrance to the cave there was the deep, indefinite blue of the open sea. I imagined some terrifying monster suddenly appearing in that blue and I hastily swam to the surface again. Although the bottom was clearly visible, our friends told us the water was more than 15 fathoms deep and we quite believed them. We had pulled ourselves down the face of the coral, but the increasing pressure on our ear-drums had warned us we had no hope of getting near the bottom.

It was a sight not to be easily forgotten. We stayed until the setting sun warned us it was time to be going, for the darkness of night follows quickly after sunset in these latitudes.

And so the days passed quickly, lengthening into weeks, and before we knew where we were three weeks had passed. It was time we were moving on.

On the 30th of October we filled the tanks with fresh water and got our clearance for Norfolk Island. We bade farewell to our many friends and slowly sailed down the harbour.

Dick was the best-looking man among us and, when we left port, he broke more fair hearts than the rest of us put together.

"I think we ought to call in at Falevai," said Dick, "and have a bit of a dance for the last night."

So that night the *Ngataki* anchored off the picturesque sheltered village of Falevai, on the island of Kapa, and the crew renewed many acquaintances they had made at Neiafu and made the most of the festivities ashore.

The following morning the friendly natives came on board, bringing about half a ton of bananas, coconuts, yams, kumaras, taros and pineapples. They would have given us tons of stuff, but already our stowage space was severely taxed and our for'ard cabin looked more like a fruit shop than a yacht's cabin. One of them brought some young leaves off the taro plant and instructed Sandy (who was considered to be the best cook on board) in the preparation of that most relished Tongan dish, known locally as "Lu". In it, I believe, you cut up small bits of pork, wrap them up in the taro leaves and cook them in rich coconut milk. You then do something else to it but I've forgotten just what it is - Sandy has the recipe.

About 3 p.m. we reluctantly got under way and headed for the open Pacific. The wind was fresh and we averaged five knots. Having cleared all the small islands, we headed south-south-east, half east, so as to leave, I calculated, the high island of Tofua on the starboard side and a complicated network of dangerous coral reefs, known as Hakau Lahi, on the port side.

For tea that night Sandy went to great trouble to produce his "Lu".

The natives might have thought the stuff a delicacy, but we didn't. We had no pork on board, so Sandy had to use bully-beef and that may have had something to do with it. Sandy stoutly maintained it was wonderful stuff and ate his share with gusto. Peter followed his example, but Dick and I, after a few mouthfuls, found it burnt our throats and we threw the rest of our helpings overboard and had ship's biscuits for tea.

An hour or so later we were rewarded for our caution; that is, if you could call it a reward to listen to the painfully loud, retching noises of two people as they are violently sick over the side, I was not feeling too good myself round the tum-tum, but I smiled and went to sleep.

At 3 a.m. Dick awoke me. It was my watch.

I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, looked at the clock to make sure he was not trying to put a few minutes across me, resignedly pulled on my pants and slowly went on deck.

"It's a lovely night," said Dick enthusiastically, "everything's good. The stars are shining brightly, the breeze is steady and the ship's doing well over five knots."

"Yes?" I murmured. I hadn't noticed anything particularly beautiful about the night. But a man never feels his best when he's just been awakened and first comes on deck, especially on the first night at sea. Besides, that cursed "Lu" was still troubling me.

I silently took over the tiller and Dick, still going into rhapsodies about the night, the stars, the sea and the boat, bade me a cheerful good night and promptly turned in. It is a funny thing, I thought, that a man going off watch always appears so infernally cheerful to the man just coming on.

Confound that "Lu"! Never again would I try a native delicacy prepared by an amateur cook.

After a bit I decided the night wasn't so bad after all. It was nice and warm and with the steady trade wind we were sliding through the water fairly smoothly.

But that cursed "Lu"! I hadn't had much of the stuff, but even that little bit was apparently too much for my internal workings. I wondered if I could bring it up. I leaned over the side, put my finger down my throat in the time-honoured way and made soft, retching noises. But nothing happened. I sank back into the cockpit again and lapsed into a species of trance.

What was that? It sounded like the distant roar of breakers. I became suddenly alert. We ought to be at least 20 miles away from the nearest reefs. I tried to pierce the darkness to leeward of us. Yes, there it was again - somewhere on the lee bow.

"Are you there, Dick?" I yelled, "Here - I can hear breakers over there somewhere."

Dick popped his head up, "Where?"

"Over there' - pointing through the lee shrouds.

"Yes? No, hang on! - It's over there' he said, pointing to windward.

"It isn't, it's to leeward," I said, "you can hear them distinctly now.

"What's all the row about?" inquired Sandy, sleepily poking his head through the hatch.

"There's a reef around here somewhere, but we can't make out where it is."

We all listened for a while.

It certainly seemed to me to be on the lee bow and yet-when you listened to windward it seemed to be *there* too. Then the noise seemed to be coming from behind us!

We waited again and cursed the blackness of the night.

It was growing distinctly louder and it was high time we did something about it.

Then, perhaps a hundred yards to leeward, a phosphorescent sea broke with a loud roar. I hastily altered course a few points to windward and hauled the sheets hard in.

A minute later a sea broke equally loudly to windward. Suddenly, we seemed to be surrounded by breakers. *Ngataki* gave a violent heave. Frantically I jammed the tiller hard down, although we had not much way on at the time.

Ngataki has never been very quick in stays, but now it seemed ages before our bow came into the wind. Another huge Pacific swell broke heavily on the reef quite close to us. The boat remained head to wind, her sails loudly shaking. Dick ran up and backed the staysail. I pulled the mainsail to windward and slowly, ever so slowly, the bow bore away. The sails filled on the other tack and we began to move again.

We seemed to have sailed into the centre of a network of reefs: we could hear the seas breaking on each side all too clearly.

I steered a course exactly opposite to that I had been steering before. Surely we ought to get out that way.

A quarter of an hour later the pounding of the surf was behind us and we breathed a sigh of relief.

A little later day broke. Another glorious tropical day. On each side behind us, as far as the eye could see, was a white line of surf breaking on the coral reefs.

We went about and resumed our original course making a long detour around the reef. The crew gazed at the huge swell breaking on it and mildly speculated how long the *Ngataki* would have lasted had she struck it and, if we had been wrecked, which would have been the nearest land to swim to.

It was obvious that something was the matter with our course setting or our compass and I began to investigate the matter. It took me over an hour to find out that, back in Auckland, I had wrongly worked out the error of the compass for this particular course. I had added two and two and made five and it had made the compass nearly two points out. This had put us two points further east all through the night and in the early morning had accounted for

us being right in amongst the treacherous Hakau Lahi system of reefs.

It had been an unpleasantly narrow escape and it taught me not to have too much faith in that dashed compass of mine and, in future, to give all reefs a wider berth.

At length we were in deep water again and headed for Tofua. Early the following morning we arrived off the mysterious disappearing island of the Pacific, Fonuafoo or Falcon Island. We sailed close in, for we had heard many interesting things about this place, but a heavy south-west swell breaking on the leeward shore prohibited any attempt at landing.

There did not seem to be much of interest about the place, unless you could say that a wisp of smoke coming from the top of the hill was interesting. A more barren looking region I have never seen, but then, of course, it never gives its vegetation a fair go and it is composed entirely, I believe, of volcanic ash.

As a matter of fact this island has a remarkable history. Several times it has completely disappeared, only to appear again a few years later. Each time it has risen out of the Pacific it has been entirely different in shape and size. In 1926 the only signs of its presence were clouds of smoke issuing from the sea. No land was visible. The following year it was found to have reappeared, the island being over 1½ miles in length and about 300 feet high. Immediately the Premier of Tonga landed on it and, with praiseworthy optimism, hoisted the Tongan flag, in the hope that the island would not vanish again. So far his optimism has been justified and the island is doing very well. When we saw it, it had decreased to just over a mile in length, but had risen to a height of over 470 feet.

The whole idea of a disappearing island seems rather weird, but it is not really so extraordinary when you consider the facts. The island is composed almost entirely of volcanic ash, which is quickly washed away by wind and sea. So the island shrinks. But the active volcano underneath it every now and then gets busy and gives the island a boost along, belching forth more ash and pumice, So the island grows again.

Mind you, I don't say that this is what actually happens, but it is my idea of it. I don't see how else the thing could work.

As I say, we did not land. We sailed on. We had a fair wind and the surf on the leeward side did not look inviting. Besides, the crew were a bit dicky about landing on an island with a notorious reputation for suddenly disappearing. We carried on, averaging about five knots, running before a moderate northerly wind.

On our fourth day out, after a really poisonous looking sunset, the wind backed round to the west and began to freshen in squalls. Black clouds, heralded by distant thunder and lit by flashes of lightning, began to advance and it looked as if we were in for a real tropical storm.

For some reason I have always been afraid of lightning, especially in a small boat at sea. At sea in a boat you represent the highest thing for miles

round and as such are very liable to be struck. It has always been my humble opinion that a large percentage of the wooden boats that disappear at sea are struck by lightning, probably having a hole blown out of their sides.

So I was not looking forward to what was ahead. Even the thought of our small lightning-arrester did not afford me much comfort. This was a piece of pointed steel at the top of the mast, which was connected by a wire to a shroud. At the bottom of that shroud was a small coil of copper wire, with one end fastened to the shroud and the other to a small weight. Hopefully I untied the coil and allowed the end with the weight attached to trail overboard.

Our lightning-arrester was ready for action.

At that moment Sandy came on deck, and drew my attention to a bluish light surrounding our masthead. That did not look too good. As he stood in the lee shrouds he cheerfully tried to comfort me by yelling that if we were struck by lightning death would probably be instantaneous. With that bright remark he went below again, leaving me to face the storm on my own.

Soon the wind began to freshen in gusts and the rain started to fall. A jagged streak of forked lightning pierced the darkness and shot into the water to windward of us, followed by a reverberating roar of thunder. As the storm system advanced, the wind hardened, the lightning came closer and the rain began to fall in such torrents that I could hardly breathe. With the electric binnacle light turned full on I had to get within 6 inches of the compass to see it through the rain. For a few minutes the wind blew with hurricane force while I strained every muscle to keep the ship running dead before the squall. The grim splendour of the blinding flashes of lightning and the terrific reports of the thunder brought home to me the immense forces of nature and I gloomily wondered if our comparatively tiny lightning-arrester could hope to cope with the situation if any of those jagged blinding streaks came our way.

It was frighteningly magnificent while it lasted. I know of no worse experience than that of apprehensively waiting on a dark night in a bad thunderstorm for the next blinding stab of lightning. That squall lasted practically all my watch and I was fervently glad to hand over the tiller to Sandy at midnight.

A succession of similar squalls passed over us all that night and the next day, their intensity dying towards the following evening. Little progress was possible in such weather; all canvas had to be close-reefed for the squalls and in the intervening calms the microscopic sail area was insufficient to push us ahead. Besides the wind was still westerly - nearly ahead. We headed south, in the hope of finding again the south-east trade, which seemed to have deserted us.

After three days of this, followed by a further three days of calms and light airs, the crew spent most of the time in swimming and sun-bathing.

On the third day, when we were enjoying our midday siesta, the helmsman saw a huge, grey nurse shark lazily swimming alongside the boat. It seemed to have a lot of red colouring on its back. With a shock we realized it was copper

paint from the bottom of our ship, where the brute had been rubbing itself. The nerve of it-taking off our anti-fouling paint! But perhaps it was troubled with barnacles itself and was trying to get a good anti-fouling coating.

It seemed remarkably tame, for it came so close we could have easily touched it had we wished. It swam up to anything we put overboard and seemed to smell it. We threw some bread to it. The shark turned on its side, we caught a brief glimpse of rows of ugly shining teeth and the bread was gone. After idly watching it for a while and wondering just how long it had been underneath the boat (for we had been in swimming half an hour ago), I held the .303 rifle over the side. When he swam up to investigate I shot the brute through the head at the point blank range of about a foot. It gave a few convulsive lashes with its tail and slowly sank, leaving the water all around dyed a vivid red. We afterwards regretted we had not photographed it. We had had a wonderful opportunity and it would have made an interesting study.

The following day the easterly trade started again, light at first, but gradually freshening. Once more the old *Ngataki* joyfully swooped along, heading before the steady breeze. After a few days of calms and head winds the pleasure of sailing again with a good fair wind is terrific. To us at sea the wind meant everything. The weather might be too hot or too cold, it might be sunny or raining; but, if the wind was fair and we were bowling along, the weather suited us.

For the next week we could have asked nothing better of the weather. The wind remained about east, sometimes fresh, sometimes fairly light, but all the time we made steady progress.

On November the 12th my sights showed us to be about 400 miles from the North Cape of New Zealand and about 400 miles from Norfolk Island. It was a matter of some doubt as to whether it was worth while calling at Norfolk Island since we would have to be back in Auckland by December the 1st if we were going to start in the Trans-Tasman race on the eighth.

Which should it be? Norfolk Island, or straight back to Auckland? All day we worked out distances and times and dates and at the end of the day we were no nearer a solution.

There was only one thing for it: we would cut cards. pack of cards can eliminate all arguments on a boat. We decided the cards should be cut and I should lift one. If it was a black card we would go straight back to New Zealand; if it was a red one we would call in at Norfolk Island.

Amid strained silence I cut the cards: in mid-Pacific there is something most fascinating in cutting cards to decide which is to be the next port of call.

I lifted ... the Queen of Hearts! Red it was. Gladly we trimmed the sheets and headed for Norfolk Island. We were all keen to see the place and, if Fate decreed we should go there, then we were only too willing to oblige the old Gentleman.

Three days later the distant outline of Norfolk Island lifted above the horizon. Another good landfall to my credit as a navigator! The weather was

perfect again, but the breeze was rather light and it was not until about 10 p.m. that we began to close with the shore.

Then we got quite a thrill, for we saw a light on shore. A real, live, twinkling light. It was the first island in our cruise that, viewed from the sea, had shown a light at night. This must be quite a civilized place.

Being deep water sailors now, we had no desire to try and find an anchorage for the night, so we hove-to off the island and waited for daylight. As the grey light of dawn began to show, we got under way and headed for Kingston, the settlement on the southern side of the island, where, with the present north-east wind, the only shelter would be.

On approaching Kingston, we experienced another mild thrill. There was a steamer in port. We sailed up to and around her. She was the island steamer *Morinda*, on her way from the New Hebrides to Sydney. From the interested crew that lined her rail came many inquiries: "What ship?", "Where from?", "How long have you been at sea?"

"*Ngataki*, from Vavau, seventeen days out," we replied proudly.

The Port Captain was busy darting to and fro in his little powered surf boat and soon he came over with the Port Doctor. He piloted us to the anchorage. That is, he led us along and at length pointed out, amongst the rocks about 5 fathoms below us, a small patch of sand, on which we dropped our anchor. He made us very welcome and did all he could for us, even to offering us the use of a powered surf boat in which to get ashore. But we did not need it. We could have no trouble here in getting ashore the dinghy.

He also gave us our clearance papers, explaining that in a dangerous place like this, with no safe anchorage, we might have to put out to sea suddenly at any time. That did not sound too good.

The Port Captain could not stay long with us. It was the first time as far as he could remember that there had been two overseas ships in port at once and it was a very busy day for him.

He took Sandy and Peter ashore with him. Dick and I followed in the dinghy. The islanders had apparently never seen a dinghy so small as ours and they watched our landing with keen interest. But there was no trouble here. We watched our chance, rowed up a concrete ramp on the top of a wave, quickly jumped out and hauled the dinghy up after us as the wave receded.

Solid ground once more! We lost no time in stretching our legs and the four of us set off to see what we could see.

On the flat ground a few hundred yards from the jetty there stands, striking rather a jarring note, the ruins of the old convict settlement that we had read so much about.

As usual, with all the islands we visited, we had swotted up all about Norfolk Island before we landed, so we knew quite a lot about the place.

It was originally annexed by England on account of the abundance of tall, straight pine trees, which would make excellent spars for fighting ships. But, on investigation, it was found that the trees were not good enough for spars

and so the idea was abandoned. However, a little later, shiploads of convicts from the penal establishments of New South Wales were sent there to cultivate the land and make roads. Very soon hell in full blast was operating on what had once been a peaceful island. It became the British equivalent to Devil's Island, the French penal settlement.

And the rambling ruins we could see were the grim monuments to the poor human beasts who once toiled under the lash, with the gallows their only hope of escape from their miserable world.

In 1856 the settlement was broken up and the island was given by Queen Victoria to more peaceful inhabitants - the Pitcairn Islanders, who were the descendants of the famous *Bounty* mutineers and their native wives. And the present islanders are the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers. In the Port Captain's lifeboat there was one of the old *Bounty's* lifebelts, a souvenir of which they were very proud.

As we climbed amongst the ruins it was not hard to visualize the scenes of horror that were once enacted here. I do not propose to give a detailed account of the various mechanisms of torture, of dark, stagnant dungeons, gallows, and shoots where headless bodies were slid into the sea; but, if one believes all the tales one hears, Norfolk Island must have been a juicy place to live in the good old days.

That afternoon we saw all the sights, including "Bloody Bridge", where the convicts, tiring of the tyranny of their warders, rounded on them and built their bodies into the foundations of the concrete bridge they were building at the time. When the crime was found out, they would not confess who had done the killing. So everybody working in that locality at the time was ordered to join in the digging of a huge hole which was to be their grave. When it was finished all were stood on the edge of the hole and were shot. Other convicts filled in the hole and built on top of it a huge wall of earth. We saw that wall. It is called Murderers' Mound.

I could go on telling similar stories about Norfolk Island by the hour, just as the islanders related them to me, but the "Bloody Bridge" incident will serve to show that life on the island in the 1850s was never dull. However, that is all buried in the past and the happy-go lucky islander cares nothing for the grim relics except that they are handy places from which to get suitable stones for their own homes.

That evening four tired mariners, laden with fruit, returned to their ship. We kept an anchor watch and put out our kerosene tin "anchor alarm".

The following morning we explored farther and again sampled the local hospitality. The islanders are notoriously kind-hearted. They themselves have everything they want, and, they argue, why not let everyone else have it, too? Which was, we thought, the right spirit.

As we got farther afield that day, we could appreciate more the quiet beauty of the many picturesque scenes. The island mingles the charm of the tropics with the calm reasonableness of the more temperate climes.

Everywhere were the famous Norfolk Island pines-in the gullies, over the green fields, even on the sides of precipices. Norfolk Island will never go short of timber.

Everybody greeted us with a smiling "Good-day". That is not exactly what they said, but it's more or less what they meant. For the language there is a curious mixture of old-world English and Tahitian. I have always been of the opinion that the study of languages is for the intellectual and those with a surplus of brain power. But even to me, whose brain has frequently been described as sub-normal, the island lingo is very interesting. I cannot hope to describe it; the best I can do is to say that every now and then you hear a word that you understand and you nod your head vigorously.

Practically everyone we met that day expressed great surprise on finding we were all ashore without leaving anyone to look after the boat. "You have to be very careful here," they would say. "It's very dangerous." For a while we said, "Oh, she's quite all right." But, when several old salts repeated the warning and added that the weather did not look too good, we thought there might be something in it. We hurried back to our ship.

The wind was fairly strong now from the north-east and, although we were on the leeward side of the island, the surf was running pretty high. It was a matter of some doubt whether we could get through it in the dinghy. While we stood on the little jetty wondering if we should make it, the islanders came to our rescue and launched a surf boat. We loaded it with the large supply of fruit and vegetables that the hospitable folk had brought down for us, climbed aboard and towed our empty dinghy out. Even then we had quite enough excitement before we were safely deposited on our ship.

The weather that night did not look too good. In fact, to be blunt, it looked dashed unhealthy. Heavy rain and a northerly wind of gale force made conditions at the anchorage almost insupportable. Luckily the wind was still offshore, but the huge Pacific swell now rolling in to the island made the ship snub viciously at her anchor chain. At any moment we expected it to part and we took it in turns to watch, two of us staying awake at a time. If the night had not been pitch dark, we would have up-anchored and sailed out to sea where we would have felt safer.

After endless hours the dawn came and we wasted no time in getting under way. We were very sorry at having to leave the place so soon, for we were just beginning to know the friendly islanders, and quite a lot of things had been arranged for our entertainment that day. But, unfortunately, it was not to be. Father Neptune had decreed otherwise.

With a double-reefed mainsail we were soon doing 8 knots leading before the hard northerly, and very quickly Norfolk Island began to fade behind us.

Personally, I was very glad to get away from that precarious anchorage. Norfolk Island, like so many of its kind in the Pacific, is a lovely little place - once you get ashore. But as a haven for small boats such as ours it can be devilish dangerous.

During the next three days the northerly backed very slowly co the north-west and remained at nearly gale force. It was a hard sail, but we made wonderful progress, rushing along on a south-easterly course before the huge seas.

From Norfolk Island to the North Cape of New Zealand is only about 450 miles and we ought to have covered that distance easily in three days. But at the end of the third day there was still no sight of land. It was funny. What was the matter now? Owing to the weather we had not seen the sun since leaving the island and so no sights had been possible. We carried on that night, rushing before the hard northerly wind and keeping a sharp look out for any land; but of North Cape there was no sign.

The next day the wind moderated and the sun peeped through the fast-moving clouds. I fixed our position and found we were about 150 miles east of the North Cape. We were over 100 miles out in a 450-mile run!

Something was radically wrong. It must be that compass again. I checked it up with an amplitude shot of the sun (I had even learned to do that!), and found that the instrument was again two points out. Having travelled over 550 miles, we were still 150 miles from the New Zealand coast.

Our course was altered to converge to the coast. Two days later we sighted Cape Brett. Old New Zealand once again! The wind was light west now and little progress was possible.

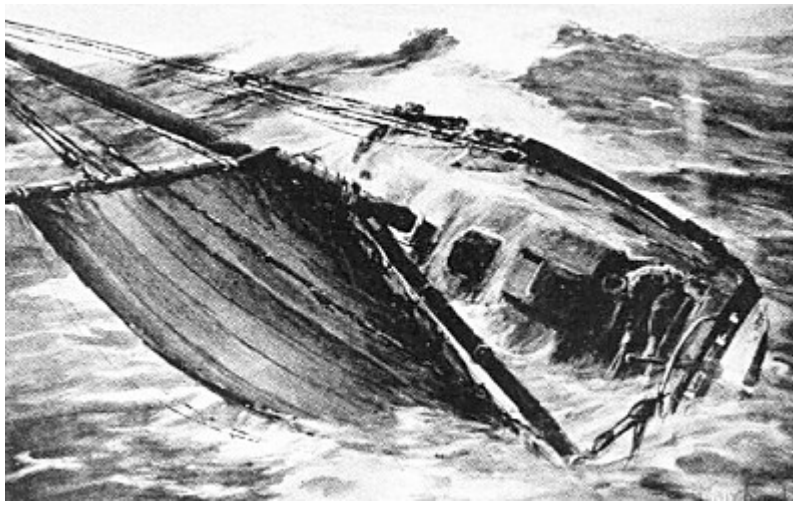
That night the topsail schooner *Huia* passed close to us under full sail. Like a phantom she silently glided in front of the rising full moon. With the moonbeams silhouetting her many sails she made a magnificent picture as she slid over the dark, sparkling waters. It was a sight never to be forgotten. If I could have captured that picture and taken it home, it would have won a prize anywhere.

With a torch I signalled her and she reported to Auckland that we were on our way home.

Four days later, for the wind had become light and baffling, we arrived in Auckland. And great was the rejoicing thereof.

Ngataki had successfully completed a long ocean cruise. She had proved herself in the sternest of all testing grounds - the open sea.

I was a proud man.



In the Storm off the Tasman Coast

CHAPTER IX

The Trans-Tasman Race

The Tasman Sea is about a 1,000 miles wide and lies between Australia and New Zealand. It has the unenviable reputation of being one of the worst stretches of water in the world and particularly is this true of its southern half.

There was a week to go to the Trans-Tasman Race, which was being run in conjunction with the Melbourne Centenary Celebrations. The course was to be from Auckland to Melbourne, a distance of 1,630 miles in a straight line, but over 2,000 by sailing route because, as the course was nearly due west, it would be necessary to keep fairly well north to avoid the hard westerlies of the Roaring Forties.

I found that several of the competitors had withdrawn from the race, leaving only three boats-the Morewa, a large local 85-feet auxiliary schooner yacht; the *Te Rapunga*, a small ketch 32 feet by 10 feet 6 inches, owned by George Dibbern; who had spent the last two years sailing his craft from Kiel, Germany, to Auckland; and our own 34 feet by 12 feet 6 inches cutter, the *Ngataki*.

We had had a wonderful cruise on our island trip, but unfortunately we had made no money and experience had shown that to go ocean cruising and ocean racing a certain amount of brass is more or less indispensable.

My former crew, not having a bob left between them, were most unwillingly forced ashore to start work and I had to get another crew. However, applications to join the ship were now numerous and I had no trouble at all in picking a good experienced crew from among friends, who were quite willing to share the expenses of such a trip.

For an ocean cruise, or for that matter for a cruise of any sort, a good crew is one of the first essentials; without it a cruise must be a failure from the start. We can be rolled around in a glassy calm, we can be called upon to pit our wits against light and baffling head winds, we can be tossed from wave to wave in a howling gale, but, if the crew are still cheerful and everybody smiles, what does it matter?

The crew of the *Ngataki* now consisted of myself, my young brother Geoff, "Buster" Graham, "Snow" Hunt, and "Merv" Robinson - all keen young men in their early twenties. Our average age was twenty-two. A few days previously Geoff had cut cards to decide whether he would go down to the South Pole again with Admiral Byrd - he had been there the previous year- or come with us; and the Melbourne trip had won. A tough young egg he was, with a voice, despite his tender years, like a fog-horn.

A few days before the race the owners of the *Morewa* withdrew their ship on the grounds that she would not be ready in time. This left only the *Te Rapunga* and the *Ngataki* out of the eight or nine boat-owners who had originally expressed their intention of starting.

On the Friday night, at a send-off given by the Royal Akarana Yacht Club, the handicaps were announced: *Morewa* was scratch, *Te Rapunga* had seven days, and *Ngataki* had seven days seventeen hours.

On Saturday, having cleared up our little affairs in town, we repaired to the Club, where the *Ngataki* was lying, and prepared the ship for sea. Here we were photographed at great length by a movie camera, for the local theatres, and it was a very proud crew that bade a prolonged farewell to the large number of friends who had come down to see us off.

About 1.30 p.m. we were towed out into the harbour, where we hoisted sails and cruised around the starting line. Very soon our rival, the *Te Rapunga,* came out from the Akarana Club and sailed up to the starting line at a pace that drew from us exclamations of surprise and admiration. This was indeed a competitor to be respected and it seemed we would have to put our best foot foremost if we wanted to beat her in this long race.

I am afraid I had not swotted up the technique of racing starts and, it being the first race I had ever sailed, we were a little vague as to the procedure. But after a number of flags had been waving for a while and a puff of smoke had been seen - no sound was heard owing to the fresh easterly wind blowing at the time - we thought we ought to do something in the matter. We sailed up to one of the committee boats and yelled out, "Is it all right to start now?"

"Yes! Yes! Go on - go for it!"

We made a bee-line for the starting line and crossed it, followed half a minute later by the *Te Rapunga*. The large crowd of white yachts and launches drew closer in around us and formed a picturesque escort down the harbour. But the boisterous weather conditions were not very conducive to escorting - the wind was hard east, making it a dead beat down the harbour - and soon most of the accompanying boats had turned back.

Our rival, as we expected, soon caught us up and passed us with a friendly grin which we weakly endeavoured to return. She was soon a fair way ahead, leaving us wallowing along doing our best against wind and tide. On the wind old *Ngataki* is not what you could call a racing machine and there was no doubt now as to which was the better boat under these conditions.

But a lot can happen in a race of 2,000 miles and we had the consolation

of knowing that, at sea, it is not always the fastest boat that wins. There is an element of luck in this game that no sailing qualities, seamanship, or knowledge can totally overcome. It was to this element that we, at the moment, pinned our faith.

Soon the *Te Rapunga* went about and was very quickly lost in the haze. That was the last we saw of her until we reached Melbourne and from then on her position with respect to ours was a matter of conjecture.

We were soon well out to sea, with the shelter of the harbour miles behind. The wind was freshening all the time and conditions did not look very promising. At 9 p.m. we were heeling over and plunging along altogether too violently. The jib was taken in and the mainsail was reefed, which eased the ship considerably. But the steep seas produced by the hard on-shore wind made her very lively and conditions below were not too comfortable. The condition of the vessel was reflected in the condition of the crew, who, in the early hours of the night, showed distinct signs of indisposition.

The day dawned grey and desolate and, with nothing but a wild, misty, watery waste surrounding us, the outlook did not look very encouraging, especially to those of the crew who had not been to sea before. Their spirits were accordingly very low; if this was life on the ocean wave, give them *terra firma* every time.

At the start of the trip Father Neptune seemed bent on making us as miserable as possible and that evening he increased the wind to gale force, making us pull down our second-storm reef. Little headway was now possible, but we had plenty of sea room, so it did not matter much. All the time we had been close-hauled, trying to get as far off the coast as possible. The seas increased with the wind and that night quite a few broke heavily on board.

Now I saw very clearly the difference between ocean cruising and ocean racing. Had we been cruising, the ship would now have been hove-to and we would have been quite comfortable. But, racing, we could not afford to heave-to with the wind, even of gale force, on the beam. So we carried on, driving the ship and suffering accordingly.

That night I remember very distinctly, above other things, several fairly solid sheets of water descending from my water-tight (?) skyline on to Buster, who was lying prostrate on the lee couch and making painfully loud retching noises into a convenient bucket.

Had the ship foundered now, the majority of the crew would have been only too glad to have gone down with it. Unanimously they decided that, if, by chance, they ever saw land again, they would give up this wild roving life and settle down to a peaceful domestic life, where at least you had a moderate chance of getting a decent sleep without being painfully ejected from bed by sudden lurches.

Our one consolation in this plunging confusion was in the knowledge that, somewhere on this desolate, grey water, the *Te Rapunga* must also be having

a lively time.

(Had we known it at the time, even this thought would have afforded us little consolation. For at that moment the *Te Rapunga* was lying on a nice, solid beach in a sheltered harbour. She had developed bad leaks in the heavy weather and had been forced into Russell, a port on the northern coast of New Zealand, where she was beached to fix up a leaking hull.)

However, all storm systems blow themselves out in a few days and the next morning the wind had moderated enough to enable us to shake the reefs out of our sails and make better headway. This was our third day out, and we celebrated the moderating of the weather by having our first real hot meal-a big stew that smelt very appetizing to those of us who could appreciate it. The sea was still very steep and the boat accordingly very jumpy, so that the cooking and eating of this first meal was no mean feat of juggling. One had to hold a plate of hot stew in one hand, a spoon in the other and, with any other spare hands, hold on to the ship.

About midday the sun peeped out from behind the fast-moving scud and I endeavoured to fix our position. It could be done only very approximately under these boisterous conditions. It is rather difficult to bring a dancing sun exactly on to a turbulent horizon. Add to this the fact that the sun shone only very occasionally and the horizon was visible only from the top of a wave which was invariably breaking-and you have some idea of the trials of an amateur navigator. However, with much perseverance and much more profanity, our latitude was found to be about the same as that of the North Cape of New Zealand and our course was altered to west to converge on the Cape.

By a longitude-shot later in the afternoon I found the ship to be over 100 miles away from land. This was 50 miles farther than we expected, but I was playing safe in keeping well off land in case the wind again increased, necessitating our heaving-to. With these unsettled conditions, we were much safer well off the coast. I did not want to take any risks with my ship, even if it did mean going 50 miles out of our course.

The next day, Tuesday the 11th, the wind was light northerly and, the sea having gone down considerably overnight, conditions were much more comfortable on board. However, a thick haze in the morning deepened into a fog which grew denser until, towards evening, the visibility was only about 100 yards. Somewhere ahead of us lay the Three Kings Islands, an isolated group of wild uninhabited islands; but they ought to be 50 miles or so away and, as we were doing only about 2 knots in the light northerly, there was no need to worry yet.

The next day dawned with only a light zephyr from the north and the fog denser than ever. We steered west and hoped for the best. About midday the wind dropped right away and left us rolling on a misty, glassy calm.

About 2 p.m. the fog temporarily lifted and showed, to our intense surprise, Great Island, of the Three Kings Group, less than a mile away. This

was most disconcerting to the methodical navigator, for a few minutes previously it had seemed we must be hundreds of miles from anywhere. We took a bearing on the island before the fog again enveloped it and the rest of that day and night were spent in endeavouring to flap our way away from it. It was not very pleasant, for our ears were the only means of telling how close we were to the breakers. The paddles were unlashed and kept in readiness in case we got too close to the rocks.

The following morning, to our gratification and relief, a light air from the south-east began to disperse the fog and fill our sails. The other islands of the Group became visible and with a freshening breeze were soon left behind. Every light sail in the heterogeneous collection that *Ngataki* boasted was set and in the afternoon we were doing 5 knots.

All our wet clothes were brought forth to dry, it being the first opportunity since we had left Auckland. Any ship passing must have thought *Ngataki* was a travelling junk shop displaying all its wares. Wet clothes draped from the mast and rigging; every inch of deck was covered with mattresses, blankets and clothes; the vegetables were spread out for an airing; and even the bread - twenty-four loaves - was neatly arranged along the cabin-top.

Having dried things out, we settled down to the real business of racing and, with an energetic crew setting every stitch of canvas we possessed, we were soon averaging 6 knots. Even blankets and towels were set up in the rigging wherever opportunity offered. Truly, she was a sight for sore eyes.

For the next few days the weather could not have been more perfect. The sun shone all day from a cloudless sky and the breeze remained light but steady from the south-east. It seemed we were on the edge of the trade wind belt, where the easterly trades were just sufficient to overcome the westerlies of the higher latitudes. The treacherous Tasman, which we had heard so much about, was as calm as a mill pond, with no more than a long, easy swell rolling up from the south-west.

Conditions could not have been better for sailing and everybody was in very good spirits. Forgotten were the discomforts of the first few days and the rash promises made about settling down to a quiet domestic life. One could not wish for anything better than this - this was the perfect life - life on the ocean wave. Thoughts were entertained of our many friends in Auckland working in offices in the city and a motion of sympathy for them was carried unanimously.

During this spell of fine weather our time was not entirely wasted. I instructed the crew in the elements of navigation - such as I knew - and for the next few days there was a constant stream of enthusiasts parading with sextants. (I had acquired another sextant - a much better one - for this trip.) The cabin of the *Ngataki* began to look more like a city office as five amateur navigators, surrounded by books and papers, frantically turned over pages of logarithms in a vain endeavour to place us somewhere on the chart. On the first day we were placed in the four corners of the earth by different numbers

of the crew, Merv once being actually six times round the world out! On being told that mean local time was different from apparent local time because the sun is not where it ought to be, their intellect was naturally clouded for the rest of the afternoon and they dimly wondered why they ever started this navigation business.

But, as the days passed, their efforts became more successful. In about five days the crew were all more or less navigators. I could now discourse fluently on logarithmic haversines of hour angles and the crew would not even flicker an eyelid. I could not have done this four days previously, when even the mention of such terms would have drawn from them exclamations of mingled respect and horror.

We were settling down to the life and were dropping into the nautical routine. For the first few days it was a matter of some perseverance to get a member out of his bunk in the early hours of the morning to take his watch on deck. There were only four bunks and a crew of five, so that the man coming off watch had the most recently vacated bunk. This meant we had different bunks each night and, on hurriedly coming down in the dark to awaken your man, it was a matter of some doubt as to where he lay. The change-over had often to be done quickly, for the tiller could not be left for long; yet it had to be done discreetly and tactfully, for to awaken the wrong man, as was occasionally done, was to invite a fierce onslaught of vituperation that could end only in confused retreat. It is most disconcerting to be rudely awakened from sweet slumber at some unearthly hour of the morning by a misinformed man who thinks you are somebody else.

But common sense devised a way and it became quite a common thing to see a man leap more or less lightly out of his bunk on being called up. It gladdened the heart of an old sea-dog like myself who had been to sea before - once.

One night during the fair weather I was awakened by a series of loud thuds and a lot of shouting and stamping going on above me. I hastily clambered out and went on deck to find an exciting rat-hunt in full swing.

I forgot to mention that when we left Tonga we took with us a young stowaway in the form of a rat. That rat was the most elusive thing on earth and, despite all our ingenuity, he still remained at large. Often on dark nights he would suddenly appear on deck, only to vanish immediately. By now he had become so well known that he had been given a name - Herbert.

Apparently Herbert had had the cool nerve to try to climb up the helmsman's pants, giving both Buster and Herbert the shock of their young lives. Now Buster was thirsting for Herbert's blood. Twice Herbert ran right round the deck closely pursued by a blood-thirsty Buster armed with an oar. Then he disappeared again.

Baffled, we turned in and once more silence settled over the *Ngataki* as she slid peacefully over the Tasman Sea.

Personally I could not see any harm in Herbert's presence.

He more or less guaranteed the safety of the *Ngataki*. For is it not true that no harm will come to a ship that has rats on board?

But the rest of the crew would not let the matter drop. So an antiquated rat-trap was produced, overhauled and reconditioned. When it was pronounced to be in running order, it was baited and placed in an inconspicuous place in the galley, where it was promptly forgotten.

We were forcibly reminded of it a few nights later, when, at about 3 a.m., we were all rudely awakened by an agonized yell from the helmsman, who, yielding to the pangs of hunger, had deserted his post and was stealthily searching for the chocolate locker. The rat-trap had closed on his fingers, and he had let the world know about it.

Having been awakened, I went up on deck. As I stood hanging on to the lee shrouds, I saw-creeping along the deck-none other than our friend Herbert. On his little face there seemed to be a triumphant smile as if to say: "You'll never catch me *that* way. I've seen too many of those trap affairs!" I aimed a sudden kick at him, but my bare foot connected with nothing but a spar lashed on deck. I hopped and swore and went below.

On December the 18th we had been ten days at sea. The weather for the past week had been perfect. The sun had shone continuously out of a clear blue sky and the crew were rapidly developing a healthy tan. For the last five days we had carried a wonderful accumulation of sails, including mainsail, staysail, leader, two spinnakers, two water-sails, topsail and ringtail. With a very light following breeze we had been averaging a modest four knots. This gave us 100 miles a day and we were slowly but steadily making progress across the Tasman. Each day at noon I got our position and the crew eagerly clustered round to see where we were. A run of 100 miles represented only an inch on the chart and we were therefore advancing only an inch a day, which is not very encouraging for a day's work. Nevertheless our track was now about half-way across the chart and the distance covered something in the region of 1,000 miles.

That evening, from a landlubber's point of view, the sunset would have been a pretty sight; but we knew better. The misty yellow colours seemed clearly to indicate that our spell of fine weather would very soon be over.

Sure enough, next morning the wind had backed to the north and had increased in strength. Dark clouds appeared over the horizon and the barometer started to fall. By midday it was blowing quite fresh and we had all our extra sails down.

Indications seemed to point to its being a cyclonic storm and as we were going, with the wind on the starboard beam, we were sailing straight for the centre of it. This was not conducive to a comfortable passage, but it was not comfort we were after now - it was speed.

The ship, driven before the increasing northerly, was now doing seven and a half knots and letting the world know about it, for it was no mean speed for our rather tubby craft with the wind abeam.

The wind sang a shrill song in the rigging, the spray flew high over the ship and the crew crawled into their bunks, resignedly prepared for another spell of dirty weather.

There was plenty of life in the old ship now - more life than was desirable. She may have been a trifle sluggish in the harbour, but under these conditions she was quite lively enough. Not until the lee deck was well under water did we shorten canvas and even then Ngatakei ploughed along at six knots. The day merged into night and a full moon somewhere above us shed a ghostly, hazy light over the boisterous waters.

The grey light of dawn brought with it still more wind and we were again obliged to shorten sail. It cut our speed to about three knots.

Many people seem to think that the harder the wind blows the faster the ship will move. While this is true up to a point, it certainly does not apply when it is blowing really hard and big seas are running. It takes infinitely more power to drive a ship through a rough sea, just the same as it takes more power to push a trolley over rough ground, and, of course, the sail area must be reduced. So that now, with a wind approaching gale force on the beam, we were only making about three knots. The wild plunging of the ship and the crashing of the waves on the bow absorbed most of the power developed by the small patches of canvas. With the wind on beam, *Ngataki's* fastest speed is just before we are forced to take the jib in.

The light scud above us was moving at breakneck speed across the sky and the seas were becoming more and more confused; it looked as if we were nearing the centre of activities.

And this proved to be the case, for at about 3 p.m. we burst from a howling gale into an area of absolute calm right into the centre of a cyclone.

The waves were madly rearing themselves skywards from all directions and the ship plunged and rolled deliriously. With no wind to fill the sails, everything flapped and banged. At one stage the whole crew were nearly swept overboard in a vain endeavour to capture the main boom that had gone mad, slashing and banging from one side of the ship to the other. The mainsheet was hauled hard in and a rope made fast to the boom, but it broke like string as the spar came across with a sickening jerk. It was terrific while it lasted, but it could only be for a minute or so, so we rested for a while and watched the progress of this fascinating phenomenon.

Above us was a circle of perfectly blue sky and all around it dark, moisture-laden clouds revolved dizzily. The wind seemed to be blowing all around, but none reached us. The small circle of fine weather moved across in an easterly direction and we prepared to get the wind again. Suddenly the breeze appeared and everything became strangely quiet as the sails filled again. Inside thirty seconds it was blowing a gale out of the south-west.

The ship ceased to roll and plunged ahead again. The wind, now against the sea, produced short, steep waves that continually broke on board, making conditions below decidedly unpleasant. All that night *Ngataki* continued to

rear and plunge and we were obliged to wedge ourselves in our bunks with cushions in order to remain steady enough to sleep.

Next morning we were greeted by a cold, clear sky, with the wind and sea sufficiently abated to allow us to proceed under plain sail once more. That night the wind continued to fall away until it became but a light air, which backed to the east, giving us once more a fair wind. All our light sails were set again and we proceeded at a modest four knots.

The following night, the 20th, at about 11 p.m., I was awakened by a shout from the helmsman: "Sail ho! Sail ho!" I clambered out and peered with sleepy eyes around me. Buster pointed out a faint, twinkling light on the horizon. It became brighter and soon other lights appeared showing the outline of a steamer. All the crew were awake now, for this was the first steamer we had seen at sea and the troops were all excited. On showing our lights, she was seen to alter course and head for us.

"We'll signal them," I said, "and let our people back in Auckland know we're all right. Buster - what about you getting a paper and pencil and writing down the letters as I receive them? It'll make it easier." (Like so many amateurs, I could send Morse all right, but could not receive it too well.)

From her masthead came a flickering light, asking "What ship?" (I could easily read *that*, for that's what I had expected them to start off with.)

"Ya-c-h-t N-g-a-t-a-k-i f-r-o-m A-u-c-k-l-a-n-d p-l-e-a-s-e r-e-p-o-r-t u-s a-l-l O-K. W-h-a-t S-h i-p?" I laboriously signalled with a torch. "Stand by there - Buster - there she goes .... U - ah - 0-R-T ... A-1-K . . . um-er-O! Let's see, what's that, Buster, "port ... aik ...o'? Doesn't look right."

"That'll be the *Port Waikato*," said Merv, who knew all his ships.

"By Jove, yes, it might be, too," I said. "Hang on, I'll ask them if they've seen the *Te Rapunga*." I did so and they began to reply. "Stand by there, Buster!"

"N-O, O-T-H-um ... S-H-I-P- (I knew that word) D-I-S-um-er-oh-dash-D-!"

"Let's see, that'll be "Other ship ..." what? "dis ... d -' "disappointed'? No, it couldn't be that. By Jove, it may be "disabled". I wonder if she's ... hang on - there she goes again."

"D-O Y-O-U ... A-N-T A-N ... T.....N-G," I spelled. "That'll be 'Do you want anything?"

"N-O T-H-A-N-K-S W-E A-R-E A-L-L O-K!" I answered.

"G-O-O-D N-I-G-H-T A-N-D G-O-O-D L-U C-K," she flashed.

"G-O-O-D N-I-G-H-T," I answered.

She passed by close astern, looking quite a picture on the shimmering waters as she stood out in relief against a rising full moon. She drew away and finally disappeared beneath the horizon, leaving us once more alone on the ocean wave.

We discussed the matter at great length. Had the *Te Rapunga* been disabled? It certainly sounded like it. But, if so, was it a temporary or a

permanent disablement? I wished I had been able to ask for more details, but even that little bit of signalling had taken me over a quarter of an hour.

This episode demonstrated the use of the Morse Code and the crew resolved to set to work and learn it. Sure enough they spent the next day hurling dots and dashes at each other.

We were now only about 400 miles off the Australian coast and were beginning to count the days to our arrival.

On the 21st the wind began to increase from the north-east. We hung on to our light canvas as long as possible, but, when one sail blew out and another carried away its sheet, it was time to get them in. We were now averaging seven knots and, as we kept it up all day, it was our record day's run to date, being 175 miles.

On the 22nd the wind increased to nearly gale force and the barometer fell to 29.75. All our extras were down now, and with the mainsail alone we were running before the growling seas at a giddy nine knots. This was a decidedly unstable speed, but *Ngataki* could stand it, if the crew could, and the crew did not mind the wild lurchings of the ship if we were doing nine knots towards Melbourne.

As I stood with my feet braced in the cockpit, struggling with the tiller, I *knew* then that my ship was alive. She was trying to show me what she could do and I was very proud of her. My mind travelled back to those old, grey kauri logs that had been hidden away on beaches round the New Zealand coast. If I hadn't got the sack and towed those logs into Auckland, they would still be there, hidden and wasted. But I had built a real live yacht out of them - a vessel that was now joyfully speeding along, ploughing her way across the Tasman.

At dusk, deciding that things were a little too exciting for night sailing, we reefed the mainsail. Even then we averaged over seven knots. Steering that night was no work for landlubbers or nervous gents. It was definitely tricky work keeping her dead before the wind. There was always the risk of her broaching to or gybing, and a gybe all-standing would probably lose us our mast.

But we successfully carried on through the night. The next morning it was blowing harder than ever. The barometer had fallen to the alarmingly low reading of 29.24. It was the lowest I had ever seen it and we apprehensively wondered just what dirty trick Father Neptune had up his sleeve for us this time. That we were in for something pretty dirty was obvious.

We lowered the mainsail and ran on under staysail alone. An anxious eye was kept to windward and everything was well lashed down on deck. The huge seas now mounting up behind us looked unpleasantly menacing and I would have given much to have been able to wear ship, so that she faced the grey-bearded monsters, and heave-to. We would have been far more comfortable. But heaving-to with a fair wind is not to be considered in an ocean race, where one has to make the most of every fair wind that blows. So

we carried on, averaging about five knots under staysail alone.

That afternoon the gale eased a little, backed to the south-west and freshened again. This, we decided, was a bit too much of a joke, and we hove-to.

The small double-reefed mainsail just balanced the windage on the bow of the ship and she lay quite steady, with the wind five to six points on the bow. Up, up, up she rose to meet each wave and then down, down, down into the trough again, but with a motion so gentle that, from the bunk, it was hardly noticeable. Thus we spent quite a comfortable night.

The next morning dawned bleak, dismal and cold, and the prospect of poking one's head up through the hatch was anything but inviting. It was the 24th December - Christmas Eve - and it looked as if we were going to spend our Christmas hove-to in a south-west gale about a hundred miles off the Australian coast. Possibly not very merry, but rather novel. I mean it is not everybody who spends Christmas thus.

As the day wore on and conditions did not seem to get any better, we decided we could not let Christmas Eve pass like this. We had never before let the 24th pass without our little drop of tiger's milk and we had no intention of doing so now. We had a supply of beer on board and a few bottles were produced. The crew settled down to celebrate Christmas Eve. After a hearty lunch, more bottles of afternoon tea were consumed and it was not long before the festive spirit of the season prevailed in the *Ngataki*. In fact, a party of sorts resulted. "Let it blow," was the unanimous verdict. Vigorously the crew indulged in what might loosely be described as community singing, to the accompaniment of a mandolin, swannee-whistles, and banging pot-lids. "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" It was the true Christmas spirit.

Had a vessel passed us as we lay hove-to, her crew or passengers, on seeing us riding in the big seas, would probably have said to each other: "How terrible it must be to be cooped up in a little boat in such weather!" Little would they have dreamt of the scene prevailing below decks. The unfortunate wretches cooped up in their little ship were having the time of their lives.

Towards evening the wind backed to the south and moderated sufficiently for us to get under way. Gingerly the crew came on deck, hoisted the staysail and shook a reef out of the mainsail.

The yacht began to lumber along again, heading, hoped, for Gabe Island, on the Australian coast.

We had organized a "sweep". Each had put a shilling in the pool and the one who first sighted land collected. But there was a corollary to this: If anyone shouted "Land ho!" and there was no land, he would have to put another shilling in the pool. So that the next morning, Christmas Day, when we were due to sight land, all hands were on deck early, eagerly scanning the sky-line. I mean, five bob is five bob. In the very early morning Buster, and then Snow, had yelled "Land ho!" on the strength of some dark, solid-looking clouds on the horizon. But that land had vanished with the clouds and now

there was 7s. in the pool.

With all that wealth at stake, we kept a sharp look-out. A little later I thought I saw the faint outline of a range of hills on the somewhat hazy horizon. I could see that Buster had also seen it, but neither of us wanted, as yet, to commit ourselves. We looked at the horizon and we looked at each other. Then Geoff came on deck. He glanced around at the horizon and we could see his face light up as he spotted the dark shape ahead. He opened his mouth, but Buster, who was intently watching his face, beat him by a fraction of a second. "Land ho! Land ho!" cried Buster excitedly. Sure enough, a little later the lightening of the clouds showed that it was undoubtedly land.

Everybody who has made an ocean voyage in a small boat will agree that you can never realize the excitement produced by that simple cry of "Land ho!" after weeks of fair winds and foul winds, storms and calms, until you have actually experienced it. This was indeed an acceptable Christmas box.

We were getting into shallower water, the depth now being only about a hundred fathoms, and this was reflected in the state of the sea, which was getting shorter and steeper with the fresh south-east wind.

The boat was therefore very jumpy, but Buster (the best cook on board) nevertheless made a valiant attempt to cook us a sumptuous, five-course Christmas dinner. He made a great picture, whistling away in the galley, wearing a cook's hat and covered from head to foot with flour - for a basin of flour, disregarding all the laws of gravity, had just leapt at him when the ship had taken a sudden lurch.

To produce a complicated dinner under these conditions requires juggling ability to a very high degree, for it is no mean feat to mix materials on a gyrating bench or cook on a stove where the pots show a distinct inclination to jump off when you're not looking. When a wave bigger than usual approached, I would yell a warning to Buster and Co. in the galley and they would hang on intently to all the basins and plates until the critical moment had passed. Altogether a very tricky business.

At length a menu was produced that would compare favourably with any hotel fare and we all ate very well, but not very wisely. Having gorged ourselves, we crawled into the bunks and for the rest of the afternoon there was little activity aboard *Ngataki*.

Later in the day I fixed our position approximately by taking a bearing on the distant land before it disappeared in the haze. The weather was getting thicker all the time and Bass Strait, which we were approaching, is a tough passage in heavy weather. The Strait lies between Wilson's Promontory on the south-east corner of Australia and the North Coast of Tasmania and in that confined stretch of water lie hundreds of small islands and submerged reefs. So when approaching it, especially in heavy weather, it is advisable to know just where you are.

It grew dark very early that day and a light rain fell from a leaden sky. We averaged seven knots through the night with a fresh east wind behind us.

The following morning dawned thicker than ever, with a moderate easterly gale behind us. It was just our luck that the weather should get dirty when we were approaching the trickiest stage of the journey. It seemed we would want all our knowledge, experience and luck in order to find the 3-mile wide passage between Wilson's Promontory and the Forty Foot Rocks.

Luckily the sun shone for an instant at about noon, enabling me to get a latitude-sight. Shortly afterwards I was brought on deck by the helmsman's cry, "Land ho! On the starboard bow!" By my latitude-shot this ought to be one of the Kent Group, at the entrance to Bass Strait. I took a bearing off it and plotted our approximate position on the chart.

Two hours later another island appeared out of the mist. This ought to be Hogan Island. I took another bearing and again plotted our position. This seemed to correspond fairly well with our first position, so we carried on, rushing before the gale, hoping for the best. It would have been pretty disconcerting to find we had mistaken the islands and were now in the wrong position, for no headway could have been made beating back against the huge seas now mounting up behind us.

It was an anxious time for all hands. The nagging uncertainty of it. Were we heading for the narrow channel still over twenty miles away, or were we on the wrong track and heading for reefs and trouble?

Black rain clouds scudded across the sky and behind us a heavy rainstorm was working up. The wind was increasing all the time, and the ship was getting less and less manageable as she madly rushed before the huge steep seas. We carried on at our absolute maximum speed, in the faint hope of getting past some of the danger before dark, but it soon became evident that we had no hope of doing so. Although it was only 5 p.m., it was already nearly dark.

Suddenly there was a temporary clearing and there, on the starboard bow, was the faint outline of a small island-apparently Cliffy Island. Bearings from this confirmed our course and we carried on a little more hopefully.

Then a steamer became visible astern heading for us, and this also seemed to show we were on the right track. It was dark now and as she came abreast I signalled her with a torch and asked her to report us all well. She replied "O.K." and passed on in the darkness. We followed her twinkling lights until they disappeared and carried on on the same course.

Two hours later, to our intense relief, a faint, flashing light on our starboard bow showed us Wilson's Promontory. Luckily the weather had now cleared sufficiently to see the light and at a giddy nine knots we rapidly approached it.

It seemed now that everything was all right and we congratulated ourselves on successfully negotiating this tricky part of the voyage.

Nearly abreast of the lighthouse the lights of another steamer were sighted ahead, coming straight for us. As she drew nearer it was evident that she would pass very close. She was about to pass us, only a couple of hundred

yards away, when a huge sea crashed on our stern, carrying it round until we were left heading straight across her bows!

The steamer, seeing both our port and starboard lights coming towards her, altered her course and swung right round to avoid us. We tore past the black shape of her bow, perhaps thirty yards away. It was far too close on such a wild night as this. No doubt her skipper was even then commenting eloquently on the apparently crazy antics of this small boat on such a night.

We regained control of the ship and continued to rush blindly on through the night.

To those of my critics who ask why I did not hand the mainsail and run before the wind and sea under staysail alone I have two replies.

The first is that we were racing and the second is that, if we had been suddenly confronted with an island or reef dead ahead, we would have had little control over the ship. Admittedly we should have reefed down the mainsail long before this, but to do so now was not quite as easy as it sounds. It is very easy to carry on too long, running before it. Anyway it would have been a very ticklish business in the dark to round the ship up and close-reef the mainsail in the seas that were running.

We drew abeam of the lighthouse and they began to call us up. Having again signalled (not without difficulty, for the light was only visible from the top of a wave), "Yacht *Ngataki* from Auckland", we asked them if they had seen the *Te Rapunga*. They replied in the negative and our hopes of victory rose, for our rival must have come past here on her way to Melbourne.

We congratulated ourselves and tore on, wildly jawing before the high, steep seas caused by the shallow water and the tide rips. We were now in the narrowest art of the Strait and it was becoming a little too exciting, madly rushing through the pitch dark with invisible islands and dangerous reefs somewhere close at hand.

Another huge sea banked up behind us. We tore down its back at breakneck speed as I strained every muscle in a vain endeavour to keep the ship on her course. It was useless. She again broached-to. This time, it seemed, for good. Drunkenly we wallowed in the trough. With the tiller hard up and the mainsheet right out, still she would not pay off. There was far too much area in that mainsail; We would just start to move and then a sea would crash down on us and hurl us bodily to leeward. The ship would be dead again.

Ahead a huge phosphorescent sea dashed itself in the air. Rocks ahead! The Forty Foot Rocks!

"All hands on deck!" The crew were hastily summoned to reef down the sails. Frantically we clawed at the heavy thrashing canvas and inside a minute the mainsail was reefed - easily a record for us. We could hear the roar of the surf on the rocks but, with the reduced canvas, the ship was once more under control. Quickly we gathered speed, gybed over and drew away from that terrifying roar.

But where there is one lot of rocks there may be another and we kept our lifebelts and distress flares in readiness. I had my signalling torch wrapped in a waterproof jacket and tucked under my jersey, so that we could still signal the now distant lighthouse should we get wrecked here. Under such conditions it was as well to be prepared.

Half an hour later all dangers had been passed and we breathed more freely. For a real terrifying thrill there is nothing to beat rushing blindly through a dark night before a gale of wind, threading your way between invisible islands and reefs. But ahead all was open water, and for the rest of the night we sailed over it with reduced sails, at a stable seven knots.

Towards morning the wind began to drop, until at midday it was but a light air. It shifted round till it came right ahead and we were left with a light head wind, only 80 miles from Melbourne.

That night we rolled around on a glassy calm, while the crew looked envyingly at the faint glare on the horizon, produced by the lights of Melbourne. What a difference from the previous night! It seemed weeks ago since we had been madly tearing through the darkness. Idly I pondered the vagaries of the climate. One day there is a nice breeze, the next day it is a howling gale - and then it is a flat calm. And some people talk of monotony at sea in a small boat! Could anyone possible find monotony in anything so fickle and changeable as the wind?

The following morning a light breeze came from behind us and, all sails drawing well, we began to move again. A fishing boat came alongside and threw us some crayfish and barracouta, which were very welcome, for no fish were caught on any part of the journey. We asked them if they had heard of the *Te Rapunga*, the German boat.

"No," they said, "she hasn't been sighted yet. But the - the New Zealand boat, you know - she arrived last evening." With that she rapidly drew away from us, before we could tell them that *we* were the "*Gartic* - "

This was news. We had arrived in Melbourne last evening, but the *Te Rapunga* hadn't been sighted. We thought the fishermen must have mixed up the two boats. That meant the *Te Rapunga* had arrived last evening. Had she beaten us after all?

With a freshening breeze we were soon doing six knots again. About 3 p.m. Port Philip heads began to open up and at 5 p.m. we were in the Rip. Here the depth of water is only about five fathoms and, with a heavy south-west swell flowing in from the Southern Ocean and a seven-knot tide rolling across it, an extremely dangerous breaking sea is produced which commands respect from the largest liners.

Luckily we struck the tide at the flood and very soon the old ship was rearing and plunging in a seething mass of turbulent water. Steep breaking waves, eddies and whirlpools produced a most extraordinary sea. But, with a seven-knot tide we were doing something like thirteen knots and it was only a matter of minutes before we entered into the sheltered waters of Port Philip.

A course was laid for the examination anchorage, where we hove-to, hoisted our yellow doctor's flag and waited for the Port Officials to grant us our *pratique*. But no one seemed to take any interest in us, so we sailed up to a wharf and inquired of the casual observers if they knew the whereabouts of the Port Doctor. They gazed at us with languid curiosity. They had never heard of the Port Doctor, but were quite interested to learn there was such a man.

Later on a launch came out and told us to report at Melbourne, for we were racing and did not need to report here.

At exactly midnight on the 28th we crossed the finishing line - the Gellibrand lighthouse. Here we learned, to our dismay, that the *Te Rapunga* had beaten us by thirty-three hours. She had to give us seventeen hours on handicap, so she had really beaten us by sixteen hours - not much, after all, in a race of nearly 2,000 miles.

We found that the *Te Rapunga* had been disabled. During the first day's heavy weather she had developed bad leaks in the hull. A vote had been taken among the crew and a majority had decided it would be safer to beach the boat and fix up the leaks before crossing the stormy Tasman. Thus she had wasted about thirty hours. But owing to the heavy weather and the ensuing flat calm we had gained very little on her in those thirty hours. We found that both ships had passed the North Cape of New Zealand within a few hours of each other.

A launch towed us up to the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria where we were very heartily welcomed, even at this hour - 1.30 - of the morning. The Yacht Club had heard we would be sailing up the harbour that night and had prepared a royal reception for us. All our sorrows - if ever there had been any- were soon forgotten and drowned in beer.

The celebrations continued until about 7 a.m. A few hours' sleep and we were out again - for my part, I confess, a little thick in the head - and for the rest of the afternoon the old *Ngataki* was towed by the Commodore's large auxiliary yacht in amongst the hundreds of pleasure boats of the harbour, where probably the biggest yachting regatta ever held in the Southern Hemisphere was being staged. The crew of each yacht, launch, and ferry-boat we passed stood up and cheered us until we all grew red in the face. It was a welcome beyond our wildest expectations; we were the honoured guests of all the yacht clubs.

In Melbourne we had a regal time.

I need say no more.

CHAPTER X

Hobart

We had promised ourselves we would stay at least a week in Melbourne. So we stayed there a week. We did more. We stayed there nearly a month. At the end of three weeks all our spare time was still booked up for weeks ahead and it looked as though we would be there for years if we were going to fulfil all our engagements.

Buster, unfortunately, had to leave us and hurry back to New Zealand. He was in the Navy and the Navy apparently wanted him.

A race was organized from Melbourne to Hobart, a distance of about 500 miles, run in conjunction with the Royal Hobart Regatta. Again the *Te Rapunga* and the *Ngataki* were the only entries. The starting date was the 23rd of January and so this day was the last day of our stay in Melbourne.

My life in the Royal St. Kilda Yacht Club revolved, I am afraid, mostly around the bar. I had patronized the bar fairly frequently during our stay and the bar was, I thought, a fitting place in which to start this next ocean race. So this was included in the racing rules: The crews of the competing yachts should be assembled at the bar of the Royal St. Kilda Yacht Club on the 23rd. The starting gun would be fired at 7 p.m. and the crews would consume a schooner of beer (for the benefit of the uninitiated, a "schooner" contains one imperial quart) as rapidly as possible. They would then run down the road and along the wharf and get under way.

Thus at 7 p.m. we were assembled at the bar of the Yacht Club, together with approximately half the population of Melbourne. The day had been spent largely in saying good-bye to our many Melbourne friends and as far as I was concerned, at least, the world had become a grand and wonderful place.

The starting gun was fired from the roof of the Club. Quickly we drained our schooners and said good-bye again. Not without some difficulty I headed my crew from the club. We raced across the road and along the wharf, to where *Ngataki* was lying in readiness. The mooring lines were cast off, sails were hoisted and we began to move away from the wharf.

A minute later we espied the *Te Rapunga's* crew labouring along the wharf, handicapped by the weight of a large sack, presumably containing bottles. We saw them get under way and then one of their number fell overboard. The *Te Rapunga* went about and picked him up. A little later the

incident was repeated and by the time he was again picked up our rival had lost half an hour to us. But the wind was fresh and dead ahead, and we knew that, in the 40-mile beat to Port Philip heads, the *Te Rapunga* would very quickly make that half-hour up.

It was not until the following evening that we arrived at the heads, after a hard twenty-four hours' slog from Melbourne. It would have been useless to attempt to beat against the seven-knot current of the flooding tide, so we anchored for a while.

A Melbourne friend rowed out to us bringing with him a morning paper, which showed interesting photographs of our headlong race along the wharf. More particularly was I interested in a large picture bearing the caption "The Skipper's Farewell." It showed my humble self apparently kissing a charming young lady good-bye, just prior to our departure. But it looked very much more as if I had the half-nelson on her and was trying to bite her ear - a mass of heads and arms and all that.

The young lady in question had been a real good sort and the parting had been hard. I had put my heart and soul into that last kiss, but I had had no idea that anyone was immortalizing the occasion with a camera, or that I looked quite like that in action.

Early the next morning the tide turned and we went out with it, pitching and plunging in the seething waters of the Rip. The southerly wind soon veered to the west, giving us a fair wind. Silently we slid over the calmer water, heading for the northern coast of Tasmania. "Silently" because each of the crew was thinking of friends we had left behind in Melbourne. Personally, I had left quite a lot of my heart in Melbourne and the rest of the crew were similarly afflicted. That was the worst of cruising around from place to place. In each port we made a number of grand friends and then came the parting. I suppose it is the way of the world. I sighed and pressed on the tiller to bring her back on her course. Under the stress of the moment we had wandered from our path.

The westerly wind freshened very quickly-and it on freshening. The next day found us with double fed mainsail, wildly bucking and boring along before a full storm.

"What, another?" I hear the sceptical reader remark. "This fellow seems to go from one storm to another. I doubt if he's ever even seen a storm at sea!"

But a full storm it was and we ran before it all that day and night. If confirmation of my words is required, I invite all who are interested to turn up the Meteorological Records at the Port of Launceston (our nearest port). There it will be seen that on that day the wind velocity reached 66 m.p.h.

Ngataki has never given any trouble when running dead before a heavy wind. Admittedly it is tricky work; but it is not dangerous if the helmsman is alert. Her high narrow stern minimizes the danger of being pooped by heavy seas, and her heavy displacement and wide beam keep her from broaching-to too readily. A heavy, beamy ship is slow and it is in this very slowness that

her safety lies when running at sea; being slow, she can never approach her critical speed. A ship of fine racing lines will travel very fast before a gale of wind. She will approach the speed of the waves and it will not be very hard for a big sea to pick her up and push her, so that she planes along before it. Then, unless her crew are very careful, she will broach-to, possibly with disastrous results.

If you are going to run safely in a small ship, you must have a beamy, full-bodied craft. If you examine any of the boats that have proved themselves at sea, you will find they are all beamy and full-bodied. Take, for instance, Slocum's *Spray*. Few were the craft more tubby than she. But it was in her very tubbiness that lay her safety. I venture to think that Captain Slocum would not have got very far on his epoch-making trip had he shipped aboard a modern fine-lined racing machine.

Ngataki is heavy and broad-beamed and that is why we were not unduly worried by the huge seas that mounted up behind us as we rushed along with the roaring bow-wave often level with the deck. Mind you, I am not suggesting that the man at the helm could afford to sit back and take things easy, but as long as he was alert to forestall trouble as it approached we had little fear of any of those great foam-flecked seas coming aboard us.

For five giddy hours we averaged ten knots-our record speed to date. Luckily the wind went down a little with the sun, but even then we averaged nearly nine knots throughout the night. It was a repetition of the night we had come through Bass Strait. We went in with a rush and we went out with a rush. I spent the night alternately climbing the gyrating mast to look for lights and rushing below to examine the charts. I will not attempt to describe all the gruelling experiences of that night (for I fear this story is already getting unduly long), but you can take it from me that I was desperately tired when I climbed into my bunk, as the grey light of dawn showed we had passed all immediate dangers.

Two days of uneventful sailing down the east coast of Tasmania followed - two days of good sailing in calm waters with off-shore breezes. We were now well into the Roaring Forties, but for the time being, at least, they seemed to have ceased their roaring.

Tasman Lighthouse, only about 70 miles from Hobart, was passed at 9 p.m. on the Sunday, four days out from Melbourne. We close-hauled and commenced the 70-mile beat into Hobart, across that stretch of water known as Storm Bay. Funny sort of name to give a place ...

We were soon to find out why it had been so called. The head wind freshened rapidly until, at midnight, we were compelled to reef the mainsail. At 3 a.m. the mainsail and staysail were double-reefed. At 5 a.m. the increasing gale forced us to heave-to.

A gale is all right as long as it blows in the right direction. In *Ngataki* we can run before a gale with little inconvenience. When the gale is on our beam we can still work it if we are very keen, although the violent motion is very

uncomfortable and we only crawl along. But when the gale blows from dead ahead we can do nothing but heave-to and wait for the wind to change.

This gale, however, promised very early in the morning to be the real genuine article. It increased from a gale to a whole gale and finally to a full storm.

The wind's shriek was eerily loud in the rigging and everywhere the waves were breaking. Luckily our tiny double-reefed mainsail was made of very heavy flax canvas and it seemed to be standing up to it all right. I peered out from the hatch. The weather was most unhealthy, yet the old ship seemed to be riding it quite happily, so I turned in and went to sleep.

CRASH-H-H-H!! Dimly I was aware of being hurled violently through the air. My head connected forcibly with a cabin-top beam; my neck was wrenched agonizingly as it somehow caught in the skylight ... and I remembered no more.

When I awoke I found myself lying on the floor with Merv holding my head above the odd foot of water that swirled around the floor. The other two were frantically bailing with buckets and basins. I tried to rise, but an intense pain in my back forced me to lie where I was.

A huge breaker had crashed on top of us, throwing the ship bodily to leeward on her beam ends. I had been hurled from my bunk, my head striking the skylight. The rest was oblivion. The others had heard the warning roar of the approaching breaker and had held on firmly to the ship. When *Ngataki* had righted herself, I had fallen on my spine from the skylight on to the lee bunk. And now, apart from everything else, it seemed my back was broken.

But it wasn't. Painfully I was helped back into my bunk, which was now sopping wet: the force of gravity seemed to have no control at all over the water that was inside the ship. It splashed everywhere. For the few seconds we had been on our beam ends water had poured solidly through the main hatch, until now it was over a foot deep on the floor. Now it surged backwards and forwards, sloshing from side to side and wetting absolutely everything, even the roof of the cabin.

But I was not much interested in the water at that moment. Some of the six tons of interior ballast had burst partially through the floor. Luckily it had not come adrift altogether, or the ship would never have righted herself and I would not be writing this now. But, if we got another breaker, that ballast was going to shift good and proper.

As soon as the boys had baled the water nearly down to the floor, I showed them where to find spare planks and hammer and nails, and they quickly nailed more planks across the floor timbers in an effort to hold the ballast down. There must have been enormous weight in that sea to have made the ballast smash through the inch floorboards.

But that was not the only damage done - not by a long way. When Snow went on deck he got the surprise of his life. For our small sail, together with the heavy boom and gaff, had been washed right up to the top of the mast!

The after end of the boom was well jammed in the cockpit. Snow pulled and pushed with all his might, but the heavy spar would not budge. Merv and Geoff went up to help him and I painfully crawled out and stuck my head through the hatch to direct operations.

It took them half an hour to get the sail and spars down to earth again. Snow climbed the swaying mast and made the jib halyard fast to the for'ard end of the boom. It was then raised so that the after end of the boom could be pulled from the cockpit. But still the terrific force of the wind on the sail jammed the whole outfit up aloft and we had to get out the handy-billy to pull down that boom. Although we seemed to be surrounded by roaring breakers, none came on board while we were doing this. If we had been struck again, anything might have happened.

At length Snow descended to the cabin-top, bringing with him the boom and sail. He stopped and pulled a small piece of smashed planking from where it had become jammed in the lee scuppers. It was all that was left of our dinghy. Poor old dinghy! It had been smashed to matchwood.

Despite lashings, everything had been washed clean off the decks. All our light canvas, temporarily stowed in the cockpit the day before, had been washed away. Altogether it had been a most expensive wave for us. None of us had seen it, but it must have been a real daddy among breakers.

Now the burning question was - were we going to get any more like it? We looked to windward and decided it was quite possible. But my head felt as if it had been bashed in and my back broken in at least six places. A man with a smashed head and broken back rarely feels like waging a long war against the sea. Let it do its worst! I crawled slowly back into my wet bunk.

But I did not go to sleep! I had been caught like that before. I stayed very much awake and hung on to the ship whenever I heard a roar louder than usual.

For the rest of that day the crew of the *Ngataki* were all very jumpy. Geoff tried several times to sell me the idea that he could hear creaking noises like planks working. As each wave crashed against the side of the ship, everybody would hold on grimly. Everyone, including myself, decided definitely now that, if ever we saw land again, we would never go to sea again. This would be the last of our ocean cruising.

The day wore on. Although more seas broke heavily on board, none of them approached the severity of the first. Towards evening the wind abated to a gale and, although the seas remained quite as large, they lost some of their breaking crests which are the real danger to a small boat.

We had often heard that Hobart is a keen yachting centre. Well, we thought, if this is a specimen of the weather they usually have here, they must be a pretty tough line in yachtsmen.

The next day was as cold as charity, with the wind abated sufficiently to allow us to get under way with closely reefed canvas.

Three days later we limped into Hobart, looking a sorry picture. The *Te*

Rapunga, which had arrived just before the storm started, escorted us up the harbour. She had been safely tied to a sheltered wharf all the time we had been out facing the full fury of the angry elements.

The ship was in a terrible mess. A few hours tidying up as we sailed up the calm waters of the harbour had made her a little more presentable, but, even so, one could not have said the old *Ngataki* looked anything like spruce when she tied up to the wharf at Hobart. Most of the town was there to welcome us, including representatives of all the local Yacht Clubs. One of them showed us the previous day's paper which told of the damage that Hobart had suffered as a result of the storm. It had been one of the worst storms in living memory. That morning, they said, they had arranged for a plane to be sent out to search for us, but we had been sighted coming up the harbour just before the plane had been called to take off. If that ballast had come adrift, I don't think the plane would have seen us.

The rest of the day was spent in tidying the ship, being photographed and talking to interested visitors.

Hobart accorded us a welcome that equalled in every way our welcome in Melbourne. We were invited everywhere and, what with one thing and another, the troops had little time to think about their crying experiences of the last few days.

The following day a man drove down on to the wharf. Would we care to go with him and see the sights of Hobart? Sure we would. We went with him and saw the sights. I'm not sure, but I think every hotel in the place was included in the sights that morning. On the way back through the town we stopped before a large building. Would we like to look over the broadcasting station? Sure we would. We went from room to room, taking a mild interest in all the gadgets. We finished up in a large room, the main decoration of which was a number of large notices around the walls involving us to silence.

"What about saying a few words over the air?" the man said.

"Well - um - ah - I don't" I stammered.

"O.K. boys," he said. "You'll be on the air in about five minutes."

We were in for it now! Truth to tell, I had always wanted to talk over the radio. But now, somehow, I wasn't quite so keen. However, we would have to decide quickly on a plan of action. I drew the crew around me.

"I'll tell you what," I said. "I'll start off by saying something like this: "Hello everybody! We welcome very much this opportunity to say "Hello" to the people of Tasmania'and then you boys chime in and say: "Sure we do. Sure we do' - see? Then 1'll say: "The trip from Melbourne' - There's the announcer beckoning to us." We went over to him.

"Ouster around the mike, boys," he said. "We'll be on as soon as this record's finished ... There!" He turned on a switch. "This is station 7HO Hobart," said he, speaking deliberately at the microphone. "We are now going to give you a special surprise. We have with us in the studio this morning, the Captain and crew of the New Zealand yacht *Ngataki*, which arrived in Hobart

yesterday after a very stormy passage from Melbourne. They will tell you something of their experiences. I feel sure they will prove highly interesting. - Ah - Captain Wray!"

People had always told me that it was hard work talking to a microphone. Till then I had not believed them. But I was wrong, for now my tongue resolutely refused to cope with the situation. I stared balefully at the microphone. The thing seemed to sneer at me. Everyone in the room looked at me and the rest of the crew grinned. My Adam's apple worked convulsively, but, beyond a few soft, clicking, noises, no sound came. There was a painfully long silence while I wished fervently for the floor to open and swallow me up. Then the announcer came to my rescue.

"Well, Captain," said he, "how do you like Hobart?"

'Good," I said - and, as an after-thought: "You've got a corker harbour."

Another long pause.

"And what sort of a trip did you have from Melbourne?"

"Not too good."

"Did you strike much bad weather?"

"Oh, yes . .. A bit of a storm here and there, you know."

Long pause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the announcer at length, "you have just been listening to Captain Wray, of the yacht *Ngataki*. And here (a little more hopefully) is Mr. Hunt, one of the crew."

Snow was evidently all prepared. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. You have just been listening to our captain telling you all about our experiences. I don't think there is much more I can add, except to say that we have already fallen in love with your beautiful little town. It is - er - um - very beautiful," he added, finishing up rather lamely, considering the magnificent start he had made.

"And here is Mr. Geoff Wray, the Captain's brother."

Geoff was caught napping: "Um - er - ah - um well - er" he stuttered.

"That was Mr. Geoff Wray," said the announcer. "And here (in desperation) is Mr. Merv Robinson." (I will have to butt in here, to remind you that the time was 11.15 in the morning). Merv took a deep breath shut his eyes and began:

"Good *evening*, everybody!"

That broke the spell. Ha! Ha! Ha!! We roared with laughter. We were still laughing when the announcer turned on his switch, and a record began to play.

So ended ingloriously the first talk over the radio by the crew of the *Ngataki*. A talk that at one stage, we had hoped, was going to be one of the greatest flights of oratory since the last general elections in Great Britain. With our tails between our legs, we withdrew from the studio and returned to our ship.

That afternoon the Lord Mayor of Hobart extended to us a civic reception

in the Town Hall. But I was prepared for this one. The previous three hours I had spent in intense study, memorizing a short speech. Even so, I felt infuriatingly shy, awkward, and self-conscious as I rose to reply to the Lord Mayor's welcome.

What a lot of faces there were in that hall. All looking at me too! "My Lord Mayor, Aldermen, ladies and gentlemen."

(Why on earth was everybody looking at my feet? Surely my pants were long enough to conceal the fact that I wore no socks.) "Speaking on behalf of my crew and myself, I would like to thank you very much for the wonderful welcome you have given us since our arrival in your beautiful little town." All eyes seemed to have wandered from my feet and were concentrated in the region of my tummy. Had I a button undone? "When we rounded Tasman Point and came into your Storm Bay, the weather did not give us much of a welcome. Abel Tasman certainly knew what he was about when he named that stretch of water Storm Bay. But now our hearts ... "

For nine and-a-half minutes, by Geoff's watch, I carried on. I sat down with applause ringing in my ears. It was not so bad, after all. In fact, quite easy - if you knew just what you were going to say.

Afterwards, while chatting with the Mayor, we learned that, when a young man, he had also built himself a small boat. With this in common, we were soon good friends. He came down to our ship and we discussed sheer-lines and forefoots and many things. He took us for sight-seeing tours, we talked ships. It was great fun having a real live Lord Mayor for a friend.

During our stay we attended many more welcomes extended to us by Yacht Clubs and other bodies and by the time we left Hobart I was quite an accomplished public speaker-well-I mean, as accomplished as I suppose I will ever be. For public speaking, like writing, is not one of my hobbies.

Later on in our stay we gave several more talks over the radio, some of them from the big national station. But we were prepared now and it was not much trouble. Had you popped your head into the *Ngataki*'s cabin or the *Te Rapunga's* cabin on one of those days, you might have seen a youthful sailor talking loudly and deliberately to a watch hung on the wall, or an ash-tray on the table. You would have probably withdrawn hurriedly, thinking that the unfortunate fellow had gone mad, or was in the rats, as they say in Hobart. But all would have been well. For the young man was only rehearsing for a talk over the air.

Those talks of ours proved very popular, according to the station managers. After I had given a talk, the manager received many phone calls, saying how my talk had been appreciated and asking if there would be any further talks by Captain Wray in the near future. Needless to say, those phone calls came from the rest of the crew and other intimate yachting friends. I mean, a talk over the air was worth 30s. And 30 s. is 30s. Similarly, when Geoff spoke on life down at the South Pole, I rang up the station, saying how I had appreciated the talk, as also did the rest of the crew. I mention this in

confidence; it wouldn't do for it to get about.

The day of the Royal Hobart Regatta dawned fine and bright, with a gentle sailing breeze - a perfect day. Regatta day in Hobart is THE day of the year. Every type of person is catered for in the amusements and the whole population attends. There are sailing, rowing and swimming races and races for trading vessels; in fact, every kind of race on land and sea. There were also side shows and clowns and merry-go-rounds and all the rest of it.

We caused quite a stir, in the race for overseas yachts, by attempting to set a ringtail and setting a water-sail - the first (according to the press the next morning) that had been seen in Hobart for very many years. *Ngataki* had a crew of nineteen and there were two 5 gallon kegs of beer to help things along. As I said before, it was a glorious day.

I will not weary you with details of all our activities in Hobart, but I will have to describe how Herbert deserted the ship.

Herbert had been definitely becoming more of a nuisance. It was not as if he just ate a potato now and then and kept to himself. He insisted on prowling round our bunks at dead of night and gnawing a little from all our potatoes. Besides we had just found that he had gnawed three large holes in our jib and we were not going to stand for that.

One day I was talking to one of the City Fathers and I mentioned that we had a troublesome rat on board.

"Do you want to get rid of it?" he asked. "That'll be no trouble. I'll get the Municipal Zoo Authorities to send you down a Death Adder. You let it loose in the boat and I bet it will catch your rat in thirty seconds!"

Now, if there is one thing in this world that I have a wholesome loathing for, it is snakes. "No thanks," I said. "I don't mind a rat on board, but I draw the line at death adders snooping around inside my ship."

"Well, I'll get them to send down a ferret. then? Although a death adder would be much quicker. They're all right, if you know how to handle them, you know," he added hopefully.

"Maybe, but the ferret would be better. I think we can cope with that all right."

The next day a very wild-looking ferret arrived in a cage in charge of a girl. She opened the little door and in no time that ferocious little beast was hot on our Herbert's trail.

First there was a scuffling in the stern locker, followed by the quick pattering of tiny feet under a bunk. Then came another scuffling up forward, followed by silence. Suddenly there was a loud commotion in the wood-bin and Herbert appeared with the ferret close behind. Nimbly the rat took refuge among the many male and female legs in our cabin. Yells from the men and shrieks from the women greeted this sally and all of us jumped on the seats and the table together. The little beggars disappeared again, and we all looked at each other sheepishly and nonchalantly stepped down from our perches. It is remarkable what a stir one rat and one ferret can cause if suddenly let loose

in mixed company!

This kept on for over an hour, and it looked as though the ferret would have to buck up if he was going to do any rat-catching that day. Undoubtedly Herbert knew his onions. He knew more of the geography of the boat, more of the cupboards and lockers on *Ngataki* than the ferret would ever know. He had the great advantage of local knowledge.

But we gave the ferret a fair go and it was not until it had proved an even greater nuisance than our Herbert that we returned it to its cage - or rather, the girl returned it. She seemed to have wonderful control over the animal just grabbed it as if it was a cushion or something. Personally I wouldn't have touched it for pounds. It had *very* sharp teeth and a nasty glint in its eye.

A few days later Herbert disappeared of his own accord. I suppose rats like a quiet and peaceful life just the same as we do and he must have thought that life was getting rather too exciting on *Ngataki*. Probably he went over and made a new home on the *Te Rapunga*, which was tied alongside us most of the time.

However, we mustn't linger on our activities in Hobart. We must move on. Sufficient is it to say that we spent a month there - a month of happy memories.

Ngataki at Hobart

Leaving Auckland for Tonga

Across Ball Bay, Norfolk Island

CHAPTER XI

Back To New Zealand

On February the 27th, we cast off our mooring lines from the wharf and got under way on our 1,900 mile voyage back to New Zealand.

Drifting down the harbour, the crew were again silent, silent at the parting from so many kindly folk who had become our friends.

Nightfall found us outside the Derwent River in Storm Bay again. Many years ago Abel Tasman had weathered a severe storm here; he certainly knew what he was about when he called that stretch of water Storm Bay. Well, we were in it again and were a little apprehensive about it. Besides, Herbert the rat had deserted in Hobart and, although we had not thought of it before, it seemed now rather a bad omen. An anxious eye was kept to windward and on the barometer.

That night the radio from Hobart sent us a farewell message. After wishing us *bon voyage* and a good fast trip, they played "Stormy Weather" for our benefit. As we were then well into waters of our previous dusting we were not altogether appreciative of the humour which inspired their choice of music. By midday the next day a south-easterly course had been set to look for the hard westerlies of the Roaring Forties.

That night we found them and very soon we had all the wind we wanted. It was not long before the old *Ngataki*, with reduced canvas, was swooping and plunging along before the rising seas. We were making eight knots, roaring our easting down. A sea would mount up behind, pick up our ship, and we would rush before it with a roaring bow-wave. No wonder the old windjammers liked these high latitudes for making their easting! Roaring Forties was right!

This giddy pace was maintained for three days, during which we covered over 500 miles-very good going for our corpulent craft. Everything pointed to a record trip back and the crew were accordingly in very good spirits.

On the fourth day out we were suddenly startled by a loud crash, followed by a heavy thud on deck and a frightened yell from Snow, who was on watch. We poked our heads up through the hatch to find Snow holding a large lump

of firewood in an attitude of defence, anxiously eyeing a tangled mass of wings and feathers that seemed, from the comparative safety of the cabin, to monopolize the whole deck.

A huge albatross had hit our mast and crashed on to the deck. It was a gigantic bird with a wing spread of about thirteen feet, for he stretched right across the ship. We had several times been followed by a few gliding albatrosses, but this one was the daddy of them all.

Ultimately we were persuaded by Snow to go on deck and give him some moral support. We came, armed with a tomahawk and carving knife, keeping our eyes on the bird, who in turn was regarding us with a baleful stare. Someone suggested albatross pie, only to be immediately howled down: it is very unlucky to kill these birds. Besides, he had an odd foot of very serviceable-looking beak which he could probably use to advantage. Nobody offered to kill him. We kept well away - we couldn't get any further away without falling off the stern of the ship. Finally the big bird gave us a defiant, cynical look and flopped with an ungainly movement over the side.

We mildly watched it float past and it was not until it had nearly disappeared astern that someone suggested taking a photograph of it. Another opportunity gone west. We had seen sharks and whales in the past swimming alongside us and never until they had bolted had anyone thought of photographing them. It is funny, but the excitement of the moment seems to drive all thoughts of photography from the head.

Believe it or not, but from the day that the albatross hit our mast our luck very definitely changed. The next day our friendly westerlies had backed round to the south-east - nearly ahead. The sheets were trimmed hard aboard and we settled down to a long beat. This was not so good.

We did not have a fair wind for the rest of the trip and some people wonder why old sailors are superstitious!

Previous to my taking to the sea I had thought nothing of walking under ladders, breaking mirrors or spilling salt. But now, after one or two cruises on the ocean, I would not dream of doing it. I think I am fairly modern and practical, yet superstition now plays quite an important part in my life; I would not leave port on a Friday for pounds, nor would I harm an albatross or a porpoise. After you have experienced a few incidents like this albatross affair with its unlucky consequences, you begin to think. The first and last time on which we set sail on a Friday, the ship was wrecked!

For a whole week the wind remained in the same quarter, never varying in strength or direction. The sun was not seen once and the weather was bleak and cold in the extreme. We were way down in the fifties, south of most of the land masses of the world and not far, it seemed, from the South Pole. A glare, apparently from the Aurora Australis, was seen every night way down in the southern sky.

The one compensating factor for these miserable monotonous conditions was that the boat was very easily handled. The sails and tiller were not

touched for over a week and the crew spent the time mostly reading in their bunks, as it was too cold to go on deck.

Although our average speed was considerably decreased by the head wind, we were still making fairly good time. It was a great experience, cooking and eating, reading and sleeping, while the yacht sailed herself towards New Zealand with never a hand at the helm.

On our thirteenth day out the sun was seen for the first time since leaving Hobart and I got our position. We were within 300 miles of the New Zealand coast, with Milford Sound as our nearest land.

The next day dawned fine and bright with a light and fitful easterly breeze. At about 7 a.m. the masts and funnel of a steamer were sighted. She passed hull down and was nearly out of sight again, when she altered course and came back towards us. They were probably wondering what on earth so small a craft was doing so far away from land. She came alongside and stopped.

"Are you all right?" the skipper bellowed from the bridge through a megaphone.

"Yes, thanks," we yelled in chorus.

"What ship?"

"*Ngataki*, fourteen days out from Hobart."

"From where?"

"Hobart!"

"Hobart? Hell! ... Do you want anything?"

"No thanks. Will you report us all O.K.?"

"O.K. Cheerio, and good luck."

She steamed off, slowly rising and falling to the long Pacific swell. We were left once more alone on the ocean wave, with the crew all excited at seeing their first ship the first link with the world at large since leaving Hobart, fourteen days ago.

We had considered calling in at Milford Sound and exploring some of the magnificent fiords of Southern New Zealand, but it was getting too late in the season. The equinoctial gales were due to start any time and it was much better to be away from these storm latitudes.

Two days later the easterly had increased to half a gale. We were now about 400 miles from Wellington, which was our objective, but maddeningly it lay dead to windward of us. For four days we tried to beat against the hard easterly and for four days the ship was continuously drenched with spray. The motion was vile and we made only about 12 miles a day to windward. It was heartbreaking.

On the fifth day, when the wind showed no signs of changing, we decided to miss out Wellington, and head for Auckland, about 700 miles away, which we could just lay to.

Here we saw another steamer some miles to leeward coming towards us. As she drew nearer we could see the big seas breaking right over her. Down went her bow pause - then up it rose again, flinging a huge sea high into the

air. Down it would go again and another sea would crash over her before she had time to rise to it. She was making very heavy weather of it and, although her speed was reduced to about seven knots, masses of green water were breaking solidly over her. It was a wonderful sight.

I tried to get a photo of her, but did not succeed. It was not as easy as it sounds. Under such conditions a man requires both hands to hold on to the boat without doing any fancy photography. Besides, the steamer was visible to us only from the top of a wave - which was generally breaking. Down in the trough (where we were most of the time) we were surrounded on all sides by hills of water. Also, when a ship is on the wind in such weather, to appear on deck at all is to invite a ducking. The sea, unfortunately, does not keep to itself It regularly discharged columns of spray - very wet and salty - over us all. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that the advantages are not with the amateur photographer. When there is really a bit of life on the ocean wave, it is generally impossible to photograph it.

She passed about 300 yards behind us, not altering her course at all. She blew her whistle and something white waved from her bridge. I think she would have rolled dangerously had she come broadside on to these huge seas and that is probably why she did not come over to inspect us.

As we watched her stagger by we commented on the unseaworthiness of the steamer. She was making very heavy weather of it, pounding her way through the waves, while we rode easily over the tops of them. Probably her crew were returning the compliment by deploring the dangers and discomforts of a small boat such as ours.

Two days later the wind backed to the north-east, making it a dead beat to Auckland. We went about and lay a course for Wellington. Perhaps we would call there, after all.

In a boat depending entirely on the wind for motive power there is a fascination in the delightful uncertainty of one's next destination. But one had to be firm! We could not let our destination be affected by so fickle an element as the wind. It was Auckland or bust! So we went about again and kept on slogging.

Life was just one crash after another. Ask any yachtsman what he thinks of head winds after he has beat, say, 30 or 40 miles. Then you will probably understand our feelings. We had been slogging to windward for well over a fortnight, covering in that time about 1,000 miles. Since our fourth day out-it was now our twenty-first-we had been close-hauled.

Easterly winds all the time, in a region where the hard westerlies of the Roaring Forties ought to have unchallenged supremacy. I do not suggest that the attempted suicide of the albatross actually affected the weather systems and produced these easterly winds, but still ... it was damn funny!

The next day we were heading for Norfolk Island. If this wind held, we might call in there. The suggestion, however, was vigorously howled down by the rest of the crew. We must be firm. Oh well, Auckland it is!

On the 21st the coast of New Zealand was sighted, in the neighbourhood of Hokianga. Home at last! At least it seemed to us near enough to home. To a great many Auckland yachtsmen the place would probably have been the last word in distant cruising grounds. But to us it was New Zealand-home! The rugged coast-line looked inviting to eyes that had seen no land for over three weeks. We skirted along the coast, all hands enjoying the novelty of seeing Mother Earth once more.

The following day we were out of sight of land again, about 60 miles from the North Cape. With a very light breeze we were drifting along at a modest three knots. I was dreamily steering with a vacant eye on the compass, when I was suddenly scared out of my wits by a terrific snort. I was drenched with spray as a huge whale rose slowly out of the water barely 20 feet away from the boat. It rose higher and more and more of him kept appearing until there were at least 50 feet of whale showing above the water. Goodness only knows how much more there was under the water.

He slowly disappeared again, apparently oblivious to our presence. Two or three times he sounded quite close to the ship. Then I remembered the camera. I balanced on the edge of the deck and directed the camera at the place where I thought he would come up next. Any right-minded whale would have come up there, but this one apparently lacked public spirit, or else he did not like being photographed. I waited, hand on shutter and, incidentally, nerves on edge. It is rather disconcerting to stare fixedly at a vacant stretch of water and wait for a terrific snort, followed by a shower of spray and an odd 50 feet of whale. It is like standing round waiting for a charge of dynamite to go off in the immediate vicinity, without knowing exactly where the explosion will be. That was the feeling I had-severe nervous tension, if you know what I mean.

That whale had all the fun. With a colossal roar he sounded about 20 feet behind me, on the other side of the boat. If the aforesaid charge of dynamite had exploded immediately underneath me, I could not have leapt any higher. It was only by exercising the greatest self-control that I saved myself from falling overboard with fright. I clicked the camera and took an impressive picture of empty sea. I had two more unsuccessful attempts, then gave it up as a bad job. Someone put a fishing line overboard, but for some reason the whale was not interested. He kept us company for about two hours.

That night we passed Cape Maria Van Diemen. I signalled the lighthouse-at least, I called them up. I sent them a series of dots, the calling-up sign of the Morse Code. I kept on flashing, but the lighthouse remained unresponsive. I carried on for an hour and a half, then gave it up in disgust.

"D-A-M-N YO-U!" I signalled. I then closed down for the night and went to sleep.

The following morning the North Cape of New Zealand was passed and we sailed from the restlessness of the Tasman into the quieter waters of the East Coast of New Zealand. Three days later we arrived triumphantly in

Auckland. After the doctor had granted us our *pratique*, we wasted no time in getting ashore. The ocean wave is all right, but there are times when a little *terra firma* is appreciated. A host of friends were there to welcome us and it was not long before we were celebrating our arrival in the approved manner.

We found that we *had* been seen by Cape Maria lighthouse. On examining a few-days'-old paper, we found with much interest that a strange yacht had been sighted off the Cape, sailing in an easterly direction, apparently from Australia. It had given its name as "*Dannou*". No boat of that name was known by the lighthouse keepers and no more had been heard of the mysterious vessel. It had just disappeared. We did not trouble to enlighten them. The lighthouse keeper must have been able to pick up only my signing-off sentiment, "Damn you!"

And so ended the most enjoyable three months or so that any of us had ever spent. We shall ever preserve the pleasant memories of happy days in Melbourne and Hobart.

It is our ambition to return one day to those hospitable shores.

CHAPTER XII

An Attempt At Island Trading

After all these months of bone idleness and pleasure, it was time (we were told) that we thought of domg something more serious in the world. Being mere mortals, we would have to go to work. It was not because we were broke (I had made enough in prize money to last me for a fair while), but it was more for the moral effect.

Geoff and I got a job in a wool store. Every day, starting at the unearthly hour of 8a.m., we pulled wool, pushed wool, pressed wool, carried wool and cursed wool. Our fellow workers were some of the toughest nuts in Auckland.

So far our life had not lacked variety. From sailing across the wide Pacific to the lure and romance of the South Sea Islands, we found ourselves racing across the stormy Tasman. From living on rice and ship's biscuit and bully-beef, hundreds of miles from anywhere, we were thrust into the centre of a hectic, whirling life in Melbourne, where elaborate dinners of about fifteen courses, accompanied by the appropriate wine for each course, were hospitably set before us. Then once more the solitude, rice and bully-beef as we sailed to Hobart. There, the civic receptions and Lord Mayors and more grand times. Again the endless leagues of the Southern Ocean, with more rice, bully-beef and potatoes - this time wondering if our rice supply would see us through to New Zealand. And now here we were working in a wool store. I sighed and gave the handle of the press an extra push. As I started on the next bale, assisted by a powerful-looking desperado, I wondered what the Lord Mayor of Hobart and the Governor-General would think if they could see us now.

I began to realize that I hadn't scored so heavily off those of my friends whom I had left working in offices; in fact, the laugh was all with them. They had carried on - plodding along and doing very well. The reward will be theirs; when they are sixty or seventy, they will probably have amassed fortunes. They were content. But I had broken away and gone to sea in a small

boat. I had roved around and the Spirit of Wanderlust had got me. It had got right into my bones and I could not stifle it or get it out.

For three solid weeks I toiled in that wool store. Then the desire to be moving took me by the neck. I decided I had done enough work to satisfy my conscience for another year. I am not one of your slave-driving work fiends, but it is one of my beliefs that every man should do at least three weeks' work per year - if only for the good of his soul.

I went back to *Ngataki* and with my former shipmate, Dick Wellington, lived on board.

One night we were discussing the price of fruit.

"Take oranges," I said. "You get three of the darned things for a shilling."

Dick nodded. "And to think that on Sunday Island there are tons and tons of them going to waste."

That brought up a new line of thought.

"By Jove!" I said. "I wonder if it would pay us to go and get a load of them and bring them back here?"

"It's not a bad idea. We might make quite a lot out of it. Say there are a hundred oranges in a case and we get two dozen cases. How much is that at 3d. an orange?"

We worked it out. Thirty pounds! Fifteen quid apiece! It shouldn't cost us more than a couple of pounds each for grub.

So it was decided to sail to Sunday Island, about 700 miles away, to gather oranges for the Auckland market.

A few days later I was talking about the idea to an old friend of mine, named Alf Bacon. He had lived on Sunday Island for about ten years, but had left twelve years ago. He and another man had been the last settlers there. He owned some land there. Together with two young friends he had been trying to get back to the island for some time, to start a small settlement. But it is not easy to get to isolated uninhabited islands in the Pacific. It is necessary to charter a special steamer. Could we possibly take them? Well, yes, for a small consideration we could take them. It was agreed that they would pay the expenses of the round trip and would help us load as many oranges as we could carry.

We waited over a week for a westerly, or "V" depression, which would give us westerly winds. When the weather reports told us that such a system was approaching, we began to load up the ship.

I had not thought of it before, but, when we started on loading operations, I found that the business of settling on uninhabited islands is not as simple as it sounds. There were literally tons of gear. There is no drinking water on Sunday Island, so we had to take roofing iron to catch it and cement and wood to build a tank to hold it.

On one side of the deck we lashed our 10-foot dinghy and their 18-foot surf boat. On the other side was lashed a big stack of timber for building operations. Our for'ard cabin was filled with cement, roofing iron, tools,

spades, shovels, etc., and the main cabin was filled by passengers and crew, with all their personal gear. The galley was full of food and the cockpit full of Alsatian dogs. At least, there were two of the brutes-the biggest I had ever seen-chained to the binnacle and they took complete possession of the cockpit.

With this considerable cargo, on Saturday, the 18th of May, 1935, the 34-foot cutter *Ngataki* sailed rapidly down the harbour before a fresh westerly wind, bound for Sunday Island.

Alf Bacon was getting on in years and his one ambition, for the last twelve years, had been to return to his beloved Sunday Island. He would live there, and, God willing, he would die there. He had seen all he wanted to see of the struggle for existence in the city. For twelve years he had dreamed Sunday Island, thought and talked Sunday Island. If ever a man had a dream-island in the Pacific, that man was Alf.

Now, as the grey, towering buildings of Auckland began to fade behind us, Alf breathed a sigh of content and crawled into his bunk. Reg and Bruce, his two companions, had decided to go there for a few years and live the simple life. After that, their future would lie in the hands of Old Man Destiny.

Running before the fresh westerly wind, we rapidly drew away from the coast and very soon the troops began to feel the long swell. The dogs were the first to feed the fishes, followed by Alf, myself, Bruce and Reg. in that order. Dick was one of those annoying persons who have cast-iron guts and was never affected by the motion of the ship.

I was beginning to find that it is always the same the first day or two at sea. Usually it takes a normal tummy about two days to adapt itself to the incessant motion. After that you can be fairly sure that the afore-mentioned tummy will start to work smoothly and its owner begin to feel fit again. But for the first day or two even good sailors who are not actually sea-sick can count on feeling more or less like something the cat has just brought in. Particularly is this true if you sail rapidly from the calm waters of the harbour to storm-tossed seas outside, as in the present instance. For the first two or three days, therefore, no serious cooking was done.

After three or four days, however, the troops developed extraordinary appetites and very quickly made up for lost time. When they had successfully surrounded their first real meal, they definitely said good-bye to further attacks. Then began the real business of ocean cruising the setting of extra sails, swimming, sun bathing (weather permitting), cooking, navigating, fishing and all the rest of it. It was not until our fifth day out that we began to organize a jazz band. Alf then unearthed his zither, I got my banjo, Bruce his swannee whistle and Reg his comb and tissue-paper. We practised a couple of hours a day and by the time the island was reached the Savoy Band had nothing on us - at least for volume. But I am getting ahead of my story.

That hard westerly wind lasted for three days, during which we made good progress. On the fourth day, however, the wind veered to the north-west

and increased so hard that early in the afternoon we were compelled to heave-to. This was not so good. Resignedly we crawled into our bunks, Bruce, however, preferring to stay on deck and watch the waves. It was a never failing wonder to him, to watch the ship riding gracefully over the big waves. And there was something wonderful about the ease with which she climbed to the top of each huge sea, remained poised for an instant and then gracefully slid down its back as it rolled away to leeward. With the mainsail double-reefed and sheeted hard in and the tiller lashed to leeward, it was no trouble at all.

But towards evening the wind increased to a full gale and the seas began to break heavily. When a small breaker came on board and soaked Bruce, he decided he had seen enough for the time being. Grumbling, he came below.

A little later a much heavier sea descended on *Ngataki's* decks, making her reel drunkenly. The dogs yelled blue murder and the clatter of falling crockery from the galley was drowned by ominous rumblings and thuds above us. Quickly we went on deck, to find the surf boat had come adrift and some of the timber lashed on deck had broken loose and had been washed away.

An 18-foot surf boat slithering and grinding over the deck of a 34-foot yacht is not a thing to be encouraged, especially in a storm hundreds of miles off land. Steadily we worked and finally had the surf boat well secured again. The lashings on the timber were reinforced and then we held a council of war. The seas were breaking heavily all around us and things did not look too healthy. We would have to do something quickly if we were to keep our heavy deck cargo intact. It was decided to pour oil on the troubled waters.

A gallon tin was filled with old crank-case drainings and a small nail hole was punched in its lid and another in the bottom. Together with a couple of heavy bolts to keep it down in the water the tin was placed in a sack and let over the windward side. With about 15 fathoms of 1-inch rope it was tied to the windward shrouds. Soon a thin film of oil appeared on the water to windward of us. We climbed back into our bunks.

No further heavy breakers came on board that night, which was probably due to layers of oil on the water to windward.

The next morning there were still traces of oil on the water. Daybreak found the gale abated considerably, with the wind round in the south-west-nearly a dead run. No time was wasted in getting under way and we were soon making good progress again.

That day I started navigating for the first time. For the first few days, as I have said, I do little in the way of position finding, etc. As long as we are sailing in the general direction of our objective, that is all I ask. Only when we are approaching land do I become inquisitive and really settle down to work.

The results of my sights that day were rather disappointing. We had not progressed nearly as far as I had thought.

The next day I was getting my noon altitude, when Reg interrupted. "It's not midday now, is it?" he asked. "The sun ought to be due north of us at

midday."

"It's midday, all right," I replied. What did Reg know about it, anyway? "If you have any doubts about it, pop below and take a squint at the clock."

There the matter dropped and I worked out my sights. All the same, I was a little uneasy about my sights. They were right, of course, but-surely we ought to be nearer the island than they indicated. Also, the sun *ought* to be about north of us at midday and to-day it certainly was not.

It was well west of north when I had got my noon altitude. I was still anxious that night as I listened for the first radio time signal of the trip. It is always disquieting to find no land where clearly land should have been, to be nagged by a little doubt of uncertainty when the rest of the crew are beginning to weigh in with sarcastic remarks. When the time signal came over my uneasiness was not allayed much for I found that the wretched "chronometer" was over an hour out!

That, of course, put my sights all to blazes. How on earth could the damn thing have varied so much? I soon found out! The difference between New Zealand time and Greenwich time is half an hour, that is, by the clock - it is really eleven and a half hours. When we left New Zealand I changed the "chronometer" from New Zealand time to Greenwich time; but I put the damn thing half an hour back instead of forward.

As a result of this childish error, we were about 100 miles past Sunday Island. We must have sailed past it the previous day without seeing it. And now it was a dead beat back to the island. I was not very popular on board as we turned the old *Ngataki* round and hauled the sheets hard in.

At midnight the following night Dick awoke me. "We're there, Johnny," he said. "Just off Denham Bay. You can hear the breakers."

I was very quickly wide awake. "Are we that close? I didn't think we would be there until to-morrow." I poked my head up through the hatch. The night was pitch black. When my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, I saw the faintly darker outline of high cliffs towering above us. Alf was on deck. "It's Hutchinson's Bluff," he said. "Denham Bay's round the corner. Dick says he can hear the breakers, but I can't."

I took over and sailed the ship away from the place for about an hour. Then I hove her to and waited for daylight. There was no sign of the island now, but the night was pitch dark and I did not worry.

As a lightening in the east heralded the approach of dawn, I again looked back, but could still see no sign of the place. Finally the sun rose and sent powerful beams between the dark clouds on the horizon. The horizon was quite clear now-clear of any sign of land. Of the wretched Sunday Island there was now no sign.

Dick and Alf came on deck, looked around and scratched their heads. Although there were plenty of dark rainclouds about, the visibility was good and under these conditions the island ought to have been visible for at least 40 miles.

Our Sunday Island of last night must have been one of those dark clouds.

As this painful fact dawned on our intelligence, Bruce and Reg, who had not seen the "island", came on deck and added to our discomfort with a few well chosen remarks. Dick, who had heard the "breakers," looked particularly sheepish as we close-hauled her again and started to beat once more against the light head wind.

Although on shore it may take a man months of study to master the art of navigation, yet out at sea it takes only about a week to pick it up. On the previous island trip I had taught Dick as much as I knew and within the week he was more or less proficient.

Now he took sights and worked them out very well, although his results sometimes differed a little from mine. However, to-day I had the laugh of him, for his calculations yielded a position which showed we must have sailed right *through* Sunday Island during the night. Dick, remembering the incident of the clouds, thought that that might quite easily be right.

What with one thing and another, and unaware, of course, of my efficiency as a navigator, the troops began to think they were well and truly lost. Reg thought the island was due east of us because there was a bank of dark clouds down to the eastward and Alf thought it was to the west, because he had seen some mutton birds flying in that direction. Dick thought it was north of us, because his sights gave him a position south of the island. And I thought it was about south of us, because my sights yielded a position north of the island. Bruce did not know where the place was and did not care, because he was lying in the sun and enjoying himself.

That was roughly the position as we slowly sailed along on a south-easterly course that day.

The next morning, to everybody's surprise, the dim outline of Sunday Island appeared straight ahead of us. To be quite candid, I had not really expected it to appear quite where it did, for the south-easterly course on which we had been sailing was the nearest we could lay to due south. However, I said nothing about that and did my best to convey the impression that I had known where it would appear all the time. It could not possibly have been anywhere else, I argued.

All that day Alf sat on deck and watched his beloved Sunday Island slowly rising from the horizon. We could not quite lay it and it was not until nearly noon next day that we arrived off the northern beach and anchored off the Fishing Rocks.

Dick and Bruce immediately landed and made their way to the orange trees to begin picking the fruit. The rest of us carried on getting the gear ashore. It was rather tricky work, for there was quite a fair surge on the rocks. From the surf boat we dropped a stern anchor a few yards off-shore and allowed the boat to plane in on the top of a surge. As it was brought up short by the anchor rope, we would throw out a couple of sheets of roofing-iron or a bag of cement to Reg on the rocks and retire as quickly as possible.

That night we maintained an anchor watch and put out our "anchor alarm", for the weather did not look too encouraging.

Early the following morning the last of the gear was landed and we concentrated on loading oranges. But it was hard work, for the fruit had to be carried about 2 miles over rough rocks. Towards evening we had on board half a dozen sugar bags and half a dozen cases of the world's best oranges. But the weather was definitely getting bad. The freshening wind was coming round the headland, turning our anchorage into a lee shore. The ship was plunging and tugging at her anchor chains. It would have been madness to have attempted to stay the night there. Besides, this north-east wind was a fair wind back to New Zealand and so it was decided to get under way.

Reg and Bruce helped us up with the anchors. They could not, of course, land the surf boat at the rocks; they would have to go through the surf to the beach. We bade them farewell and wished them luck. They would probably need it before they got through the surf that was then running. They reluctantly cast off and began to row in towards the thundering surf. They had never done anything like this work before and they were not too sure of themselves.

We waited just outside the breakers in case they needed assistance and watched them disappear in the trough of the immense waves that were rolling in towards the shore. Every now and then we caught sight of them on top of a wave. Then we saw them rushing madly towards the beach before an enormous sea, with Reg braced against the steer oar. We saw the sea break and the boat turn a complete somersault. We caught a distant glimpse of Reg flying through the air and the stern of the boat poking up through the back of the wave. Then they disappeared.

Anxiously we waited. Perhaps they would swim back to us if they could make no headway against the strong undertow. Dragging in a sunken surf boat against a heavy undertow was no mean feat. We sailed in as close as we dared and waited.

It must have been half an hour later when, to our intense relief, we saw them pulling the swamped boat into shallow water. We waved farewell to the distant figures and got under way.

Sunday Island was inhabited again, despite the *Pilot Book's* assertion to the contrary. All previous attempts at settling the place had ended more or less disastrously. How would the present settlers fare? We wished them well.

Our for'ard cabin was less than half full of oranges and we would have liked to have filled it up. But Sunday is a wild place and when anchored off it one must, entertain the greatest respect for the weather. Father Neptune had ordained that we should leave and so we left, for it is a fact that, if you kick against Father Neptune's decrees too much, you will sooner or later get it in the neck.

Besides, this was only a trial shipment. If we found that it paid us, we would make further trips and get a bigger cargo. It was decided that, owing to

the small quantity of fruit we carried, we would impose a ration on the crew's consumption. We would have only six oranges a day each.

The next day we passed quite near to a small barren island, Curtis Island, which is very actively volcanic. We sailed close in and gazed with interest at the strange island. At one corner an active volcano had blown out and the crater had formed a tiny little harbour, perhaps 30 yards across. We would have liked to explore, but there was no possible anchorage, as the grey rocks were steep-to.

But we could not pass this lonely spot dumped in the vastness of the Pacific without making some investigation. There might be buried treasure on it, or something. We sailed around for a time and then launched our ten-foot punt. Dick got aboard and rowed in, while I sailed off and on to the island. Dick disappeared into the crater.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later he came slowly rowing out again. I sailed up to him and picked him up. As he painfully rolled on board, I discovered his left leg all puffed up and terribly red.

He told me that when he approached the island he found the sea water quite warm. He rowed into the crater to find the sea water quite hot - he could just bear his foot in it. It must have been very active to heat up the surrounding sea so effectively. On the cliffs all around him were steam and burning sulphur, giving the place the appearance of a smouldering inferno. He picked a suitable landing place and jumped on the rocks on the top of a surge. Stepping backwards a pace, he had put his leg into a hole of nearly boiling sulphur-water! Quickly withdrawing it, he plunged it into the sea. After a while it had become a little less painful and he had clambered into the punt and rowed out. He had seen all he wanted to see of strange little islands.

His leg did look pretty rotten. I sponged it with picric acid and smothered it with coconut oil. That seemed to relieve the pain.

We got under way on our journey back to New Zealand and a few hours later Curtis Island had disappeared.

Luckily his leg had not been very badly scalded and in a few days Dick was able to get around again. But it cooled our ardour for exploration and since then we have never been so keen on investigating unknown islands.

When we left Curtis Island we decided it was but a hollow mockery to cut down our oranges to six a day when we had a for'ard cabin full of them. We increased the ration to twelve a day each. The following day we lifted the restriction altogether and from then on we averaged about twenty a day each. We liked oranges.

The trip back to New Zealand was completed without incident. We had fair winds all the time, except for one day. And, truth to tell, we were very glad of that temporary head wind. For the watches were rather hard-six hours on and six hours off. We carried mainsail and spinnaker most of the time, so the tiller could not be left unattended. Thus all cooking, etc., had to be done in the "off" watch and we rarely got more than four or five hours' sleep a night.

So that when the wind went ahead, we cheerfully shortened sail, hove to and slept intermittently for twenty-four hours, by which time the wind was very obligingly fair again.

After a fairly smart passage of six days the coast of New Zealand was sighted. That night we anchored in a picturesque landlocked bay, Whangamumu, where there is a whaling station. I had been told that whale oil is one of the best storm oils you can get. So we traded a few of our remaining oranges for a few gallons of whale oil. We left the next morning, but with light and baffling winds down the coast it was not until three days later that we arrived in Auckland. When we sailed up the harbour we had only half a case of oranges left, out of all the cases and bags with which we had left Sunday Island. That half-case disappeared in another three days.

We had had quite a good cruise, interesting and instructive; but you could not say it had been a roaring success from a financial point of view.

For, with a cheerful disregard of economics, the crew had eaten all the profits!

Copper Sheathing Ngataki

CHAPTER XIII

A Cruise To Tahiti

The time was about a month later and the scene was the public bar of the Ambassadors Hotel, in Auckland. The hour was 5.20 p.m. At 5.30 p.m. *Ngataki* was due to sail for Tahiti and "other places beyond the seas".

Why we were bound for Tahiti is of no importance; it just happened that opportunity in the shape of a paying crew had come our way and I had gladly accepted it.

All preparations were complete, the ship was ready and the crew Arthur Mathias, Jack Baxter, Nip Colebrook and myself-together with about forty friends, had gathered within the sanctity of the bar to do a bit of heavy farewelling.

The babble and laughter of those present, punctuated by the frequent popping of corks and the comfortable gurgle of liquor as it was lowered down the hatches of the crew and their friends, produced just the right atmosphere for an occasion such as this, when a man is taking leave of civilization for a few months. "Well, here's luck, Johnny; may you have a good cruise." We drank in silence, everybody benevolently smiling at everybody else. As a matter of fact, I had been doing this off and on all day and, what with one thing and another, I was beginning to think that the world was not such a bad place after all. It is surprising how busy one can be on the day of departure.

Suddenly a voice demanded: "Where's Arthur?" We looked around. He was nowhere to be seen. Sensation! We couldn't allow him to disappear at the critical moment. We were due to sail in five minutes. We paused for a little deductive reasoning. According to my experience, at the moment of leave-taking a sailorman without beer is like duck without green peas. There was, I decided, only one other place he could be. I went to the private bar. Sure enough, there he was in the centre of a ring of friends being toasted in the time-honoured custom.

"Hallo, Johnny; come and have a quick one with us," the company greeted me.

"No, thanks. Got to think of my complexion. Besides, I've got to take the

ship to sea to-night. I came to collect Arthur."

"Don't worry about the old *Ngataki*, she can take care of herself. Here, put this down." A pot of beer was thrust into my hands by one of Arthur's hosts.

I put "this" down - no one can say I ever refuse beer on such occasions - and grinned my appreciation. Then, with Arthur and the rest of the crew, I made tracks for the old ship.

Here we found an embarrassingly large group of friends waiting to say good-bye. Having at length bade a prolonged farewell to them, we got aboard and cast off the mooring lines. In accordance with my usual practice on the occasion of public departures, I had "Methuselah" all keyed up and ready to go. I swung the flywheel and it started first "pop". Most gratifying. "Methuselah," despite his thirty-four years of more or less active service, still occasionally condescended to go, but this was the first time he had started first "pop" with so many people looking at him.

Slowly we chugged away from the launch steps, accompanied by cries of "Good luck", "*Bon voyage*", and other expressions less complimentary. We got the sails up just as "Methuselah" gave up the struggle, and silently glided down the harbour before a light sou'-wester. In the gathering dusk a passing steamer whistled us farewell. We were away at last!

Things seemed unnaturally quiet after the hurry and bustle of the past few days. We sat around the cockpit and drank in the quiet beauty of the night, now enhanced by a rising full moon.

An hour after our departure what little wind there was left us and it did not look as though we should get very far that night. The crew were all tired and sleepy after their heavy day in the city, so it was unanimously decided to anchor in the nearest convenient bay for the night. There we got sail off her, anchored, and in a few minutes everybody was fast asleep.

The following day was bright and sunny with a light south-westerly breeze and it was agreed to make for the Great Barrier Island, about 50 miles away. There we intended to spend a couple of days getting everything ship-shape before putting out to sea. Besides, we wanted some firewood for the stove. That night we dropped anchor in a sheltered little cove on Great Barrier Island. Early next morning two of the crew went ashore and caught half a dozen crayfish. The morning was spent in cutting firewood. The crayfish were cooked in a kerosene tin over a fire on the beach, and then - lunch.

A clean, sandy beach, a kindly sun spreading its genial warmth over us, blue sparkling waters, green hills, a white yacht peacefully anchored out in the bay - what more perfect surroundings could one have for a perfect lunch of bread and cheese, crayfish and beer?

The next day was spent similarly, collecting more firewood, stowing gear and overhauling *Ngataki's* rigging The weather was perfect. Conditions could not have been better for getting things ship-shape.

When everything was ready, a nor'-easter sprang up - a head wind. Well, it was no use starting off with a beat to windward. The nor'-easter freshened and

blew hard for three days, during which we were snugly anchored in our sheltered cove, congratulating ourselves that we were not out in the thick of it.

On the morning of the fourth day a hard westerly was blowing, a fair wind for us. Conditions were unsettled, but that mattered little. We had been waiting for a slant, so we hastened to get under way. At sea, as long as the wind is fair, the weather suits us.

At midday the northernmost part of the Great Barrier was passed. About 4 p.m. the last of New Zealand had disappeared below the horizon and we were left alone on the wide seas. Watches were set - three hours on and nine hours off - and a course was laid for our old friend Sunday Island, 670 miles away. We wanted to see how the three men whom I had left there six months earlier were getting on. We also wanted a stock of oranges.

I For the next few days the westerly wind blew long and hard and the seas ran moderately high. But we were reeling off the miles, averaging seven knots on one or two days, although the boat was definitely lively for the first two. As usual the ship's complement suffered more or less from *mal de mer*. Jack, particularly during those first few days of boisterous weather, showed definite signs of indisposition. In fact, to quote his own words: "He'd never felt so ruddy crook in all his life."

But lest any reader should scoff at him, let me say that better and stronger men than you or I have been smitten by the same complaint, being transformed by the mere roll of a ship into retching and glassy-eyed wrecks. I, personally, know of the case of a skipper of a local coastal steamer who invariably leaves his false teeth in his cabin at the first sign of bad weather. Regular passengers on that run who knew their onions made a point before sailing of seeing the skipper, just to make sure he was complete with all dental accessories. When he was seen minus his false teeth, passengers might prepare for the worst.

I mention this to show that this wretched sea-sickness is not overcome by the habit of going to sea. It might, perhaps, be thought that we would have become immune from it, but-no. As usual, for the first couple of days, we were, if not bad, certainly not at our best.

Arthur voiced the general feelings of those present with the words: "This trip will cure me of roving for life. After this, I'll settle down and get married."

On the tiller it was good sailing. The *Ngataki* was joyously swooping along before the big seas, her bow wave roaring. But below decks, even after our respective insides had adapted themselves to the violent motion, things were not comfortable. Even a professional juggler would have experienced a certain amount of difficulty in getting outside a good meal under these conditions, as Nip found when a plate of hot stew slid off the table and came to rest nestling coyly upside down in his lap.

But we live and learn. Our method of attack, though possibly not very elegant, had the advantage of being efficient. The general procedure was to

hold a plate of food in one hand, a spoon in the other, and brace your feet against the table. In that way you could give undivided attention to the meal. Any extras, such as coffee, would be parked on the lee side of the floor. for experience had shown that nothing could fall any farther.

The casual observer, seeing the crew of the *Ngataki* snooping around the floor in search of a cup of coffee, might well have been excused for thinking that we were reverting to the methods of our prehistoric ancestors. But we did not mind. We had found that a plate of stew in the tummy is worth two spilt in the lap; and, similarly, that a cup of coffee in the hand is worth two in the bilge.

Towards the evening of the third day out, the wind increased to gale force. From inside the cabin one could hear the distant roar of an approaching sea. It would grow louder. The stern would lift to the sea and our bow-wave would roar louder as we raced before it. There would follow a crash on the quarter, a shower of spray on deck and a crisp oath from the helmsman. One could appreciate the feeling behind the epithets to the full from the pleasant comfort of a warm bunk. But conditions were not too comfortable. When the breaking seas became more frequent, it was decided to heave-to for the night.

The mainsail was double-reefed and hauled hard in, the staysail was lowered and lashed down and the tiller was lashed to leeward. Rigged thus, the *Ngataki* lay with the wind about six points on the bow, gracefully breasting the waves like a duck, with never a splash coming on board.

"There you are," I said proudly to Arthur. "She's quite steady now. You wouldn't think you were out of the harbour."

But Arthur was not so sure. "Put your head up through the hatch, Johnny, and take a look at some of those seas. You'll soon lose the idea about being in the harbour."

All hands turned in. Next morning we awoke after a good night's sleep to find the wind had moderated a little. The storm reef was shaken out and, under single-reefed
mainsail, the old *Ngataki* was soon doing her seven knots again.

That night at the helm my nostrils were suddenly assailed by a faint but unmistakable sulphurous smell. Ah! Our old friend Curtis Island, the first of the Kermadec Group. We must be in the lee of it, although, by dead reckoning, it should have been 25 miles to windward of us. The dashed place was apparently still as active as ever.

About 10 a.m. the next morning Arthur, who was on watch, shattered the cabin with a stentorian roar: "There she is! Land ho! Land ho, there!"

Low down on the distant horizon, hardly distinguishable from the dark clouds around it, was the darker outline of Sunday Island. The rest of the day was spent closing in on the place and at 6 p.m. we reached it. We had made a pretty fast trip *Ngataki's* record to date-taking only five days, including one night hove-to. On the previous trip we had taken nine days and our first trip eleven days.

The weather was still boisterous, a succession of westerly rain squalls still passing over us, and we deemed it inadvisable to anchor for the night behind the island which afforded even on the lee shore very doubtful shelter. We decided to heave-to off the island and wait for daylight before attempting a landing. I have always preferred to be hove-to at sea than anchored in an exposed harbour. It is far safer and, to my mind, infinitely more comfortable. At anchor in the open roadstead off Sunday Island, *Ngataki* would sometimes nearly roll her gunwales under water in the swell.

About 3 a.m. we began the beat back to the island, for during the night we had been blown about 8 miles off it. At about 10 a.m. we rounded Fishing Rocks and came in sight of the northern beach.

All eyes were concentrated ashore for signs of the three "Robinson Crusoes".

"There! There they are!" On a flat plateau, three quarters of a mile away, a smoke signal curled into the sky. By the side of it we saw a naked figure, wildly waving his arms. He was joined a moment later by a second, then a third; They were all *alive*, anyway. They waved frantically and then hurried away. We took soundings, dropped our big anchor and prepared to wait for them to come out in their surf boat.

A quarter of an hour later they appeared on the beach. Having dragged their boat down, they got aboard and began to pull out, until we lost sight of them behind the breakers.

"There she is!" The bow of the surf boat rose to the oncoming sea and threw spray high into the air as she met the first wave. She disappeared again. Thirty seconds later the whole boat was, it seemed, catapulted into the air. She turned a complete somersault and landed upside down with her bow inshore. We caught a momentary glimpse of three men thrown into the air, then - nothing. We climbed the mast, but could see no further sign of them. They ought to have had too much experience of the surf by now to have come to much harm, but nevertheless we were anxious, for the surf was very heavy.

We waited apprehensively for perhaps a quarter of an hour and then we saw them in shallow water, pulling the swamped boat shorewards. Then they signalled to us-by making the dots and dashes of the Morse code with an oar-to launch our dinghy and establish communication at a better landing place, Fishing Rocks, a couple of miles down the coast.

Our 8-feet dinghy was launched and loaded up with books, mail and a little food we had brought them. I got aboard and began the long pull down the coast, having first given instructions to the others to get under way and get out to sea should anything happen to the ground tackle, for the ship was snubbing hard on the anchor chain in the rough sea.

Half an hour later I arrived. Here the rocks went out into deep water and in the lee of them it was possible to land. "Cheerio!" I yelled to the figures on the rocks.

"Hello, Johnny," they chorused, and there was a wealth of greeting in

those first two words.

I pulled in closer and looked up. I looked again at that rugged, bearded figure above me. He had long hair, a bright ginger beard adorned his face, and he was clad in a scanty pair of shorts (which he afterwards admitted were worn specially for this occasion). Was this the Bruce Robinson I had left behind me but a few months ago?

"Well, Bruce, Robinson Crusoe has got nothing on YOU now."

He grinned at me through his shrubbery. "Johnny, this is the life. This will do me for a while yet."

"You like it, eh?"

"Too right."

Reg Randall and Alf Bacon then came to the edge of the rock, each staggering under the weight of a large sack of oranges.

"G'day," I grinned. "How's life on the Island, Alf?"

They assured me they liked the primitive life very much. They had not seen or heard any sign of the outside world since we had left them six months ago, but they were happy and contented. Their original supply of food was nearly exhausted and they were now living on what the island could produce, but this was enough. There were plenty of fish, vegetables, meat, fruit, fresh air and warm sunlight; what more could a man ask? Each morning Bruce would go to the top of the hill on which we had seen the smoke signal and look out for any passing ships, but we were the first boat he had seen. No other ships, apparently, frequented these isolated waters. The weather that winter had been perfect and only on the very cold days had it been necessary to wear any clothes. To-day, they said, was one of the coldest they had had for some time, yet it seemed quite warm to me. I wore nothing but my spectacles.

I unloaded the dinghy and, loaded up with oranges, not without some difficulty in coping with the heavy surge off the rocks.

We carried on a long conversation, exchanging items of news, until it was time for me to pull out. "You're going to have a stiff pull back," yelled Alf, "I wouldn't like to have it on." I wasn't too keen, either. For *Ngataki* was hull down below the horizon from here. It was against the wind and there was quite a fair sea running. Like a stupid ass I had forgotten a bailing tin and my dinghy had already shipped a lot of water. But the longer I waited the worse it would be, so I started off.

It was agreed that, if I put the international code flag "R" in the rigging when I returned, we would anchor the *Ngataki* down off the rocks and they would get us a couple of goats and some more oranges.

An hour later I was half back and was beginning to feel the effects of the long pull. I paused as a big splash a few feet behind the dinghy showed me there were fish there. I looked over the stern and saw, but a foot below the surface, dozens of big fish following me. I looked at them and wondered. What a paradise for fishermen!

But I had to get back to the oars again; the strong wind was blowing me

back rapidly and if I wasn't careful I would be joining those kingfish in the water in the near future. After over two hours of strenuous rowing I reached the ship. It was none too soon for I was nearly exhausted and the dinghy was over a third full of water.

The next hour was spent in consuming Sunday Island oranges - the best in the world. I have never tasted better. We simply had to have some more, so, with the "R" flag in the rigging, we sailed under staysail to the rocks, where we again anchored.

More oranges were loaded and also a couple of goats. Roasted on our stove, they would provide a welcome change from canned meat. Alf wanted us to stay a couple of days on the island and nothing would have suited us better, but the unsettled weather conditions soon made us abandon any such idea. The anchorage was altogether too exposed. At 5.30 p.m. we got under way and headed out into the blue. An hour later the *Ngataki* was doing seven knots before a hard westerly and Sunday Island had disappeared in the gathering darkness behind us.

It was August 25th, we were five days out from Sunday Island. Having held a good westerly wind all the way, we had made fairly good time and were now heading for the isolated island of Rapa, about 1,800 miles due east of Sunday Island. We had no special reason for going there except that it looked a nice place on the chart. The *Pilot Book's* description of it sounded interesting and somebody remembered having heard from some source or other that the women there outnumbered the men by about five to one. So Rapa it was.

At midday, as usual, I shot the sun, worked out our position and plotted it on the chart.

"Well," said Arthur when I had finished, "where are we now?"

"Latitude 31° 04' south, longitude 164° 15' east."

"Sounds all right. How far have we come from Sunday Island?"

I measured the distance. "706 miles."

"And how far to Tahiti?"

"By sailing route, 1,520 miles."

"Is that all? And how far from New Zealand?"

"About 1,100 miles."

"Well - Where's the nearest land?"

"About 6 miles away."

"Six miles?" he said, lifting his eyes and gazing around the horizon. "Whereabouts?"

"Straight down."

"Ass, I mean dry land."

"Savage Island, I should imagine, about 690 miles due north of us."

"It seems to me," he grinned, "we're a darned long way from anywhere. Just somewhere in the Pacific. Sling over half a dozen oranges, Nip, and I'll

make an orange gin for the troops."

We were passing over one of the deepest parts of the world's oceans, the recorded depth being 34,400 feet. Down on the ocean floor the pressure would be about 7 tons to the square inch. We wondered what kind of weird creatures there were 6 miles below us to stand this pressure.

The following day, having covered but 53 miles with a light breeze, we were again looking at the chart. Rapa was still well over a thousand miles away and we were not moving very fast.

"We're just about holding our own with Rapa," said Jack. "What other islands are there in the Pacific?"

"We shall go fairly close to the Austral Group," I replied. "May call in there somewhere, what do you think?"

"O.K. with me. I'm not fussy where we go."

We held a general meeting to discuss which island we would visit next. Arthur spoke up: "Rimatara is in the Austral Group. It looks a nice little spot out in the blue. What's it say about that, Johnny?"

I consulted the *Pilot Book.* "Population 413, no whites, got a fringing coral reef which is steep-to, and no anchorage worth speaking of-not much good, I think."

"What about Tubuai?"

I consulted the book again. "Sounds all right - nice island, with prevailing easterly winds; there is good anchorage in thirty fathoms. That's torn it - we've only got 20 fathoms of chain - no good, I'm afraid."

"Rurutu, how about that?"

"Population 879 - stated to be friendly and good natured. There is a white man there - a Gendarme Administrant - on the north-east coast. Fairly good anchorage afforded in Avera Bay."

"Sounds all right. Shall we go there?"

"Suits me," I said, "it might be a bit chilly at Rapa at this time of the year. Rurutu's in the tropics, at least it ought to be warm there. What do you think?"

It was agreed, and so the *Ngataki* was headed for Rurutu, 1,160 miles away.

Five days later we had covered a further 400 miles. On our course for Rurutu we were heading further northwards and it was definitely getting warmer. Progress was fairly slow, but our winding track was nevertheless slowly creeping over the chart. The weather was gloriously fine now; the wind, though light, was steady.

We spent the time eating, sleeping, reading, navigating - or attempting to navigate - sun-bathing and swimming. But when we were swimming a very close lookout was maintained for sharks and the troops wasted no time in regaining the ship. In fact, "swimming" was rather a loose way of describing it. It invariably consisted of an ungainly plunge into the gloriously warm water, followed by a wild rush for the rope that was left trailing over the stern. The man in the water was just a mass of frantically waving arms and legs until

he had grabbed the rope and hauled himself quickly over the stern. If you had seen some of the sharks that we saw prowling around the boat, you would have understood our hurry to get out of the water. It was a pity because we could have stayed in that warm water all day, but the occasional sight of a black fin ominously cutting the surface was enough to put one off swimming for life. However, we had a lot of sport capturing the sharks that came within the range of our harpoon. When we got one, the ensuing fight would keep us busy for some time. When he was eventually brought alongside, all hands to the spinnaker halyard would be the order and we would haul as much of the brute on board as we could before administering the *coup de grâce* with an axe.

Those days were days of utter contentment and we did not care if we never saw land again. I had a favourite position on the fore-deck under the shade of the staysail, where I would lie for hours watching the gurgling bow-wave and the sparkling light blue water gliding beneath me.

At night things went just as smoothly as in the daytime. Jack produced a community song book, and at night the helmsman of each watch sang, or attempted to sing, his way through the book. But it was more than just singing it was an expression of our feelings. It was never lonely on watch alone at night. Somehow you seemed to be nearer the heart of things-the things that really matter nearer the stars, nearer Nature, nearer the Creator, than you can ever be in the heart of a crowded city. The song of the helmsman was something in the nature of a song of joy and contentment. The softly lapping waves, the slow heave of the restless ocean, the myriads of stars overhead, all combined to produce an atmosphere of indestructible peace. And so the night hours slipped by and the bright star Rigel was kept in the port rigging: it is so much easier to steer by the stars than having to concentrate on a small compass card.

The days passed quickly and it seemed no time before we were a fortnight out from Sunday Island. The fifth of September dawned bright and promised yet another perfect day. We crossed the Tropic of Capricorn that day. We celebrated, and joyfully stowed away the warm winter clothing we had required further south. All pants, jerseys, overcoats, etc., were permanently discarded and packed away. We would require them no more now until we approached the New Zealand coast again in December.

In their place lava-lavas were produced. We had heard that bright colours were one of the striking features of Tahiti and in the selection of lava-lavas we did our best to harmonize with the vividly-coloured tropics. Jack's was a brilliant red affair with bright blue flowers. I had a vivid gold one that produced a dazzling effect in sunlight; you could hardly look at it without shading your eyes. I was very proud of it. Nip was greeted with roars of laughter as he appeared on deck looking like a kewpie, a blaze of pink from the tummy southwards. Arthur hadn't brought one, so I lent him one of mine with green birds rampant on a pink background. Arthur weighs approximately

a ton and has a torso ill adapted to assuming the form of a fairy, but he made a brave attempt. We had all grown beards and moustaches and the effect when we all got together was nothing short of dazzling. No one, even by the widest stretch of imagination, would have recognized in us the four respectable young men who had left civilization but a month earlier.

Our albatrosses now began to leave us. Four or five of them had followed us for a fortnight and we were getting quite friendly. We had names for them all. George, Rastus and Egbert were the favourites and they showed surprising intelligence and got the choicest pickings.

We fed them every day on bits of biscuit and flying fish that came aboard overnight - there were generally two or three on deck in the morning. Occasionally, also, a squid would come on board. These ugly little devils, a cross between a fish and an octopus, are liable to shoot inky black liquid at you when you pick them up.

The flying fish were becoming more numerous and so were the Portuguese men-of-war. These were funny little fellows made of hard transparent stuff, tinged blue. They had a bright blue streamer hanging below them, which acted as a keel, and which we found, to our discomfort, stung like blazes if it were given half a chance. Their middle was sausage-shaped and could be blown up or deflated according to how high they want to float. Above this they set a thin curved lamina in the form of a sail. They generally ran before the wind with all sails set, but they could also go at right angles to it if they so wished. When there was no wind, or when it blew hard and the seas began to break, they just blew themselves up and apparently went to sleep.

The next day at noon we had only 270 miles to go to Rurutu. We reckoned to be there in three days. "I wonder what land looks like," mused Nip, "it's a long time since we've seen any."

"Yes, it'll be quite funny. Not a thing in sight," said Arthur, casting his eyes around. "Hallo, what's that?"

We looked ahead to where he was pointing. There was a white patch there that looked like coral. It might be, for this was more or less uncharted water. But there was no break in the surface of it.

We came abreast of it and gazed in surprise as an enormous devil fish lazily swam past. It was the biggest we had ever seen, or were ever likely to see. Arthur, who had been in the water three minutes earlier, gazed at it in horror-stricken awe and publicly announced his intention to forswear all further swimming at sea. The devil fish in question was something like a giant ray and measured about 15 feet across. It is the morbid habit of these hideous creatures to crush their victims to pulp before feeding on them at leisure. Hence Arthur's feelings on the subject.

On September 9th, just three weeks out from Sunday Island, we were due to sight Rurutu at 4.30 p.m. We had reserved a bottle of beer for five weeks specially for the occasion and as the time drew near all eyes were strained ahead. I looked forward to it with mixed feelings, for, though it would

undoubtedly be a welcome change, it would interrupt our smoothly flowing routine which, for the last few weeks, had been very pleasant. But, when four-thirty arrived and there was no land, there was a scramble for the mast. I reached the top and looked. There she was, all right! A mountain top way down on the horizon, 45 miles dead ahead. I was as proud as a peacock of this perfect landfall and mused for some time on the mysteries of navigation. To think that one had only to get the sun's altitude occasionally, work out a few figures, steer a certain course on the compass for a couple of weeks, and - presto! - one's objective appears on the horizon dead ahead. Remarkable!

We clambered down the mast and broached our last bottle of beer. That night we altered course three points further west to avoid a long reef that lies 20 miles this side of Rurutu. The barque *Henry* was lost on this with all hands (according to the *Pilot Book*) and we had no desire to follow her example.

At daylight we were 10 miles off the island. A few hours later we had closed up with it. Except for the coconut palms that grew in great profusion around the shore, the island was in general appearances not unlike Sunday Island. Avera Bay, where the anchorage was supposed to be, was identified, but a heavy south-west swell rolling in made it impossible to anchor there. We steered along the shore 100 yards off the fringing coral reef, with the roar of the angry surf ringing in our ears. There was an awe-inspiring break on the reef and we mildly speculated as to how long *Ngataki* would last on it if she touched.

Soon the northern bay, Morrei, was reached. This was the sheltered side of the island and there was practically no surf. I again climbed the mast and from this vantage point viewed the bay. At the head of the bay there seemed to be a small opening in the reef, but it was only about 30 feet wide and, with the surf on each side of it, it seemed like suicide to attempt an entry there. But there did not seem to be any other anchorage to speak of.

As we approached, large numbers of natives came out on the reef on either side of the narrow opening, apparently to help us warp the ship in; but we were not having any.

It was decided to heave-to for a quarter of an hour, and if nobody came out we would get under way and sail for Tahiti. There were five big whale boats inside the reef and we had barely hove-to before the first was manned and came out to us.

There were about thirty beefy natives aboard and as they approached they yelled, "Irana." "G'day," we yelled in reply, "how are things with you?" They merely grinned and, gesticulating, pointed to the opening. We shook our heads. And there, it seemed, the matter would have ended, until a man in the stern rose and said, "*Parlez Français?*"

In the good old days at school I was supposed to have acquired a working knowledge of French. "*oui*," I said, in my best French.

He immediately rattled off the lingo like a machine gun. After I had several times told him to "*parlez plus doucement*" I got the idea of what he

was saying. The natives would take the boat in; it would be quite all right. But I stood firm. "*Je pense que nous restons içi.*"

It would be better to anchor outside. The bottom was plainly visible below us and it could not be more than 8 fathoms. But he shook his head and said it was too deep. "*Il n'est pas trop - um - er - deep,*" I said. "*Nous pouvons voir le - le* - um-what's the French for 'bottom'? Bottom," I said, pointing down. But the gent still shook his head.

I got out the lead line to show the fellow it was really quite shallow. I paid out the line and measured it. "Nine, ten, eleven fathoms - gosh! Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen fathoms, heck! Twenty-one, twenty-two - ah!" Twenty two fathoms and you could see the bottom absolutely clearly. I wish we had water as clear as this in Auckland!

About twenty of the natives were now on board. My French friend pointed ashore, where there were two more crowded whale boats coming out. "*Un homme là qui parle Anglais,*" he said. That ought to be all right. The second surf boat came alongside and an old native jumped aboard. "Me speek Engleesh," he said. "G'day, how d'ye do?" I grinned. "We don't think much of your anchorage here and we don't want to go in there. We think we'll push on to Tahiti. Will you tell all these birds to hop it?"

He grinned. "Me speek Engleesh," he said.

I turned to Arthur. "You tell him, Arthur." Arthur went to great pains to explain the position, but the old chap did not seem to grasp the situation.

"Him in take you," he said, indicating a capable looking native. "Him pilot . . . him very good fellow. Maitae? O.K.?"

"Well, it looks as though we're for it now .... 0.K." I said and they all chorused "O.K." They seemed to know that word, if they knew nothing else.

A further ten clambered aboard and there was no further deck space available on *Ngataki*. They handled the ship very efficiently and took the matter right out of our hands. I started "Methuselah" and we began to approach the surf. There were about fifty natives on each side of the reef ready to take our lines. Just before we reached the entrance "Methuselah" gave up the struggle and our hearts stood still. *Ngataki* drifted in towards the opening and there she lay, going backwards and forwards with the surge, with the surf breaking within a few feet on either side of her. It would need only one bump on that sharp coral to put a hole in our side. But they had the situation in hand. Three ropes were thrown ashore on either side. The natives grabbed them and warped *Ngataki* in.

All the time there was enough laughing and shouting going on to awaken the dead. Evidently it was not every day that a boat came to visit them. The opening was about 150 feet deep and we were soon at the head of it. There, there was just enough room for the ship to turn round. With her bow pointing out to sea, the *Ngataki* was made fast to the coral with ten ropes and two anchor chains.

I went ashore to see the gendarme who, with the rest of the population, was waiting on the beach. He did not speak English and I again tried my hand at French. "*Bonjour, monsieur, nous avons arrive de Nouvelle Zélande. Est-ce possible que nous restons içi pendant deux ou trois jours?*"

"*Oui, vous avez vos papiers?*"

I produced the ship's papers. He looked at them with a very wise air. After a very lengthy perusal, considering that he could not read a word of them, he handed them back.

We were free to land in Rurutu, which we lost no time in doing. A sort of main street straggled along the water front and we had only to begin to walk down it to be invited into the nearest house. Everyone wanted us to visit his house. So that we did not get very far that afternoon.

The natives were very honest and generous and, unlike most of the inhabitants of other Pacific Islands, they were unspoilt by civilization. They are industrious, too, for all had big houses, built of snowy-white coral lime. They dig a big hole in the ground and burn the coral in it, thus producing the lime. It makes a very solid, cool, and clean home.

I had read in a book - *The Cruise of the Wanderlust* - of the existence of a complicated system of caves on Rurutu. I made inquiries and found out where they were. The following morning it was arranged that my French friend of the whaleboat, Toofa by name, should accompany me there. The rest of the crew were not very keen, as it involved a long and dangerous climb, so Toofa and I set off alone.

After an hour's walking and climbing we reached the foot of a steep, rocky face. One hundred feet above us was a large hole; our objective. Some years previously a native, while attempting to reach the cave, had fallen and had been killed. Since then a "taboo" had been placed on the cave and no native would venture near it. Now, as we looked up, Toofa's enthusiasm for the enterprise waned rapidly. So, for that matter, did mine. That steep face did not look too healthy. Toofa continued to tell me of the disaster, pointing out the exact spot where the body had fallen and all the rest of it, at the end of which he asked me if I still wanted to go up. I was definitely not so keen, but if we turned back now we would undoubtedly get 'the raspberry" from the rest of the crew, so I said we might as well give it a trial. He sighed, gathered a few leaves together and commenced the climb.

The rock was sharp, brittle and loose, and you had to test each hold before putting your weight on it. We went up and up. I looked down and looked up quickly. Gosh, it was a long way down! Above me I saw Toofa panting, with a strained look on his face. He was negotiating a very difficult part. He managed it and it was my turn. I had nearly done it and was hanging on for dear life to a precarious hold, waiting for Toofa to carry on above me. But he didn't move. "*D'ici,*" he said, "*l'homme tomba.*"

"*Allez, allez*," I cried, "*ou je tombe aussi!*" But he did not "*allez*". He removed his hat and began to pray. I hung on for dear life with one foot

waving in the air. There was nowhere else to put it. An insurance company seeing me now would have paid out on the spot.

At length he finished and moved on. After what seemed an eternity we reached the safety of the cave. At the entrance Toofa immediately removed his hat, sat down and began to pray again. I sat by his side in respectful silence, until he had been going for ten minutes. Then I sighed. An odd prayer or two might be all right, but this was getting a bit too devout.

He finished, but would not come inside the cave. He gave me the leaves he had brought, telling me to lay a couple down wherever there were other caves branching off inside, so that I might find my way out again - for these caves went for miles inland and were very complicated.

I went in and explored. I went up and down, this way and that, leaving at each junction a leaf. I wish I had the ability to describe in detail all I saw. There were all sorts of magnificent coral formations, for they had once been submarine caves, and many stalactites of weird shapes and colours. Most of the interior was a snowy glistening white and looked incredibly beautiful in the torch-light.

At length I had seen enough. Finding my way back again was not quite as easy as I thought, but, thanks to the leaves, I eventually found my way to daylight again. Toofa was still waiting at the entrance and we started our downward climb, which was accomplished without incident. We were soon back at the ship.

The following day we found there were two more whites on the island. We met an American - Alan, by name - who, with his wife, had very sensibly given up the trials and tribulations of civilization and had settled down on an isolated part of Rurutu. They had no money and just lived on what they could produce off the land.

Alan invited us up to dinner one day. It was a long way up to his home among the hills, but he entertained us the whole way with stories about the old native legends, of which he had made quite a study. On the way up we passed a mountain stream in which naked women and girls were washing clothes. The crew passed by with a poor attempt at indifference.

"That's the custom here," said Alan. "Whenever they wash clothes they wear nothing, but when they have finished they are expected to wear some sort of apparel, even if it is only a scanty lava-lava." We passed on, keeping a sharp look out for further washing parties.

The dinner was a great success and showed what could be done without any help from civilization. The meat was wild chicken; the salt was evaporated from the sea; the milk was from coconuts; the bread was baked taro root; the coffee was home grown and was the best I had ever tasted. A brisk conversation was maintained, Alan and his wife inquiring about the outside world, while we asked about local affairs.

It was six months, we learnt, since a boat had called. Usually a little native cutter, about the same size as ours, called every three months, but in a severe

hurricane of the previous year four Tahitian boats had been lost. Now there were not many left to do any trading. Besides, the native skippers did not like going to Rurutu. The island was very isolated and rather hard to find. The natives knew nothing about scientific navigation, the general procedure when leaving Tahiti for Rurutu being to get two points in line at Tahiti, keep them in line till they were out of sight and then carry on on the same course. If they had not seen the island within a week, they would generally spend another week or so looking for it, sailing backwards and forwards. If they didn't find it then, they would go back to Tahiti and start over again.

Our friend said it was not uncommon for the natives to spend six weeks at sea looking for the island. Apparently they could always find Tahiti on the way back, for it was very high and broad. Anyway, there were plenty of other islands in the Tahitian group if they missed Tahiti itself. He told us of one case where a boat had set off for Rurutu and ten weeks later it landed up at Borabora, a couple of hundred miles the other side of Tahiti. The supply of food had given out in five weeks and for the remaining five weeks the crew had lived on the copra in the hold. But they did not seem to mind much. They had loaded up with food and immediately started off again to give it another go.

We looked around his island home. It was a delightful little place, built of coral lime like the rest of the houses. On a bench we saw a flute. He confessed to playing it. It was his only civilized hobby. But he was afraid he would soon have to give it up, for he was developing a hole in one of his front teeth. There were, of course, no dentists around, and that tooth would have to come out in the near future. When this happened, it appears, he would be unable to play the flute any longer.

Now, back in Auckland, my dentist had given me an assortment of dental tools, together with materials for mixing temporary fillings, porcelains, etc. There were delicate little chisels and scoop affairs and all the implements of torture that the dentist delights to use. I had them in case any of the crew developed tooth trouble while away from civilization. But I had never used them. The crew admitted quite frankly that they would suffer any agony, even to jumping overboard, rather than let me touch their teeth.

This looked like a golden opportunity for trying out my dental outfit and skill (if any). "If that's all that's worrying you," said I, "we'll soon fix that up. I'll put a permanent filling in for you, if you like. I've got all the necessary gear on the boat."

"Will you, Johnny?" Alan said, so gratefully that my conscience pricked me vigorously. But manfully I thrust conscience to one side. Certainly, I would. I did not actually say so, but I rather led him to believe that I had been filling people's teeth all my life. His joy was unbounded. He would still be able to play his beloved flute.

We went back to the boat and I proudly got out my little instruments. Innocently, Alan lay down on the couch and the crew, intensely interested,

gathered round to watch the fun. With much ostentation I washed my hands. I selected a sharp scoop affair and with the assistance of a little mirror I began to probe round in his mouth. It was quite fun and well worth trying if you can lay hold of a suitable patient. I dug the weapon into the offending tooth and he let out a yell. "That hurt?" I asked professionally. "Never mind, it'll be over in a minute - now - still, please."

I really think it wasn't too bad for him. Anyway, I had soon scraped away all the decay. Every now and then I washed the cavity out with a syringeful of water. Finally, I dried the hole by blowing air which had been heated by blow-lamp through a rubber tube into his mouth. Altogether, it was an inspiring ceremony, what with me chiselling, the blow-lamp roaring and Alan spitting frequently and vigorously into a convenient bucket. I mixed some powder, which, according to the directions, ought to harden and make porcelain, and bunged the stuff in. Thus I successfully completed my first filling. At least, I hope it was successful. It seemed all right at the time. One of these days I am going back to Rurutu, to see how it is getting on.

A couple of days later we were visited by a tribal chief, who approached us with an unusual, if flattering, request. It appeared that strong gentlemen with fair chins and longish noses were in big demand by some of the more rural tribes to improve the general physical standard of future Rurutians! Well, I had met some queer ideas and customs in my rovings, but I must admit it was the first time I had been invited to play a leading role in what appeared to be a sort of human stud farm.

On the afternoon of our fifth day at Rurutu the wind backed to the north-east and began to come in through the break in the reef. We did not want to be caught in that precarious haven and so it was decided to get under way while the going was good. The entire population came down to see us off, the generous natives bringing us large quantities of fruit and vegetables. We were really sorry to part from them, but Father Neptune decreed that we should go.

The lines and chains were taken in, leaving only a couple of ropes on each side for the natives to warp us out. After ten minutes of kindly encouragement, "Methuselah" was persuaded to start and about a score of natives on the reefs on either side of *Ngataki* yelled and pulled. We wanted to gather as much speed as possible on the short run out to enable us to get through the break at the entrance of the reef. The natives heaved vociferously, "Methuselah" kept plodding pluckily along, and in a few breathless moments *Ngataki* was clear of the coral. We breathed again and made sail.

It was only 350 miles to Tahiti, but it took us six days to do the trip. We met head winds practically all the way. On the fifth day out we were due to sight land. Tahiti is very high, being over 7,300 feet, and can be seen over a hundred miles away in clear weather; but the weather was too thick and we saw nothing but the sea.

We did not sight it that night, although it was only 75 miles away, and in the morning, when we had halved that distance, it was still invisible. The crew

spent the day looking ahead and selling each other the idea that each new cloud-bank on the horizon was Tahiti. It was not until it was nearly dark that a rain cloud ahead lifted and showed us the island barely 10 miles away.

It was a dirty night, pitch dark with a number of nasty rain squalls about, so we hove-to until about 3 a.m., when we got under way and laid a course for Papeete, on the north-west coast. At 8 a.m. we made the pass in the reef and hoisted our "Q" fag and the Red Ensign.

Soon the pilot's launch was seen coming out. We did not want a pilot, but in Papeete it is compulsory and you pay for it if you have one or not. It is a French port, so I carefully prepared some French phrases ready to spring on the pilot. When he came aboard I had it all pat.

'*Bon matin, monsieur le pilot*" I said. "*Nous sommes enchantés de vous voir. Nous avons arrivi de Nouvelle Zélande.*"

"From New Zealand, eh?" he said in good English. "Well, fellows like you should like this place."

We did. Much has been written of the wonderful beauty of Tahiti, so I will not attempt to enlarge on it. The white coral, the blue water, the multi-coloured flowers, the thick green foliage, and the high, stately mountains in the background, all combine to produce many lovely scenes.

Papeete is known as the "Paris of the South Seas," and it fully lived up to its reputation during our stay. Before we arrived the crew solemnly reminded each other that we were on a "health" cruise and, come what may, late parties and social engagements which robbed youth of its sleep would be strictly barred. Early to bed, early to rise, and all that. But the fates, or, rather, some of the local inhabitants, decreed otherwise. The first night in port we met an American doctor. He took us to his home, where we had a few "rum punches". He took us to his friends' homes, where we had a few more. With a quickly-growing party, we made a round of Papeete's restaurants and night dubs. At 2 a.m. the party was forty strong and all going well.

But I had better stop. Of the *Ngataki*'s doings in Papeete volumes could be written-but it is sufficient to say that we were entertained like kings.

Yet I must say *something* about the place. It was a real education to us. Foreign people, strange languages and customs were a source of never-ending amusement to us. Even the money was fun. Jack returned from the bank after changing his first ten-shilling note with the words: "The bloke gave me a twenty-franc note, eight nickel things with holes in them and five little brass affairs."

We found that it was the custom for all people, especially young people, to wear flowers in their hair, or behind their ears. But there was more to it than that. If you are a young Tahitian looking for a lady friend you wear the Tiare Tahiti - a delicate little white flower, the national flower of Tahiti - in your right ear; if you've got a girl, you wear it in your left ear. Apparently it is taken for granted that you are either looking for a girl or have got one.

This, we thought, was a grand idea, especially for visiting yachtsmen. If

you are walking along the water front with a flower behind your right ear and you see an attractive girl, also with a flower behind her right ear ....

For the first few days I could never remember on which ear to wear the flower, but I quickly overcame that difficulty by wearing one over each ear. While my friends in Auckland might possibly have thought me a little "pansy", the local population seemed to understand the position perfectly. The Tahitian women are generally recognized as being the most beautiful in the South Seas and I can whole-heartedly endorse that statement.

Papeete, the chief town of Tahiti, is a heterogeneous conglomeration of buildings owned mostly by Chinese. They have a very big hold in the Society group and own practically all the stores. Their influence is slowly extending throughout French Oceania and, owing to their acting as moneylenders and giving goods on credit, a lot of the natives are entirely in their hands. It is rather a pity, but the Chinese are the only people who will work in these islands. The native will not work unless he's absolutely forced to. His chief industry is making love and enjoying himself, which to me seems fundamentally sound. He will never run short of food, doesn't require much in the way of clothes, and that's all there is to it.

The busiest scene of the day in Papeete is at the market place in the early morning. Everyone rises early and by six o'clock nearly everything is sold out. All that the island produces is on sale - fruit, vegetables, fish, meat, bread, cakes, etc. - and the day's supply of fresh food is invariably obtained there. Occasionally we rose early enough to visit the market, but generally, even when we rose at the unearthly hour of six-thirty, business had finished and everybody had gone home.

I could go on describing Tahiti indefinitely. There is an atmosphere of romance about it which has to be felt to be appreciated. It cannot be caught by the pen or the lens of a camera.

When we had been in Papeete nine days, I felt that if we did not move out of the "party zone" pretty soon and get a full night's rest I should be a physical wreck. On the previous night we had all been present at a bumper binge which had carried on until the small hours of the morning, and the crew were now sitting very tired-eyed round the cabin table trying to cope with the situation. The restful silence was occasionally broken by desultory conversation, from which I gathered that the crew were in agreement with me in thinking that one could have too much of a good thing and that some other resort away from the bright lights was called for.

Murea, reputed to be one of the most beautiful islands in the Pacific, seemed to be the ideal place for such a rest cure. We could see it in the distance and its many rugged peaks and remarkably broken outline gave promise of views even more beautiful than Tahiti. It was agreed that we sail for Murea on the morrow.

The next morning, September 27th, we prepared to leave Papeete. I spent most of the morning trotting round town getting the ship's papers fixed up,

laying in a supply of food and filling the water tanks. We had never had any trouble with the water supply and, although it took us seven weeks from Auckland to Tahiti, we used only half of what we carried in that time. Rum, also, was very cheap and we laid in a supply of six dozen bottles.

About noon we were all ready to get under way. I bade farewell to Etat, a little Tahitian girl who had accompanied us on a number of our excursions, and stepped aboard.

The mooring lines were cast off and, with "Methusaleh" majestically popping, we slowly slid away from the Papeete water-front. An hour later we had cleared the barrier reef and were at sea once more. It was only a short run of 20 miles to Murea and four hours later saw us skirting along the barrier reef there, looking for the pass into Papetoai Bay.

This pass, like a number of others through coral reefs in the South Seas, was marked by the wreck of a steamer. In this case it was the wreck of the French cruiser *Kearsaint*. She had gone ashore while attempting to get out of the harbour under difficult conditions. The French, not being very proud of such a conspicuous landmark, had blown up the wreck until only a few bits of twisted steel remained, but there was still enough of it left to show us the way in. Directed from the top of the mast, whence it was possible to obtain a good view of the coral, we made the pass without much trouble and were soon in the shelter of a most beautiful bay.

Murea is about 6 miles in diameter and consists of a chain of mountains about 4,000 feet high, in the shape of a semicircle. The whole forms a magnificent amphitheatre of gigantic precipices and remarkable needle-shaped basalt peaks. Papetoai Bay seemed to be the nucleus of this formation and, as our comparatively tiny vessel sailed up the bay, surrounded on all sides by 2,000 feet cliffs, we felt utterly dwarfed and insignificant. Around the foreshore and in the valleys the green tropical vegetation formed a pleasing contrast to the grey basalt cliffs towering into the clouds. Indeed, the crew were so impressed by the scene that we broached two bottles of rum on the spot. After cruising around for a while we found a snug little cove and let go the anchor to the accompaniment of sea chanties, sung with usual *Ngataki* gusto.

As usual we were entertained by all the local inhabitants. The days passed quickly. A fishing excursion, a mountaineering party, a cruise around the bays in native canoes, another fishing excursion and so on. We led a quiet life, building up our lost constitutions and improving our fading complexions.

On the second night after our arrival I was taking the air in the cockpit after the evening meal. It was rather dark, but the night was warm, calm and peaceful. As I sat drinking in the quiet beauty of the evening, there came over the water the soft splash of paddles. A minute later a canoe silently slid alongside. Something was dumped on the deck and then a figure lightly sprang aboard. A muttered "Maruru" ("Thank you") and the canoe as silently slid away. I got up to investigate. It was the little Tahitian girl, Etat. She had

followed us over from Tahiti in the weekly cutter. In the parcel were wrapped up her world's possessions. Resolutely she announced her intention of going with us to Tonga, or New Zealand, or anywhere else we went. In French I tried to remonstrate with her and to point out the impossibility of any such arrangement, but I don't think I did too well.

Anyway, she stayed at Murea for the ten days that we spent there. When it was decided to leave for Borabora, little Etat, of course, wanted to come, too. But it was impossible. Local regulations, if nothing else, would prohibit it. We got under way with Etat on board and it was not until we were approaching the barrier reef that we could persuade her to leave. We hove the ship to and I rowed her ashore. It was a curiously sad parting. The morning was hot and sunny and Mother Nature seemed to be doing her best to produce a happy, cheerful atmosphere; but my heart was heavy as I rowed back again, away from the pathetic little figure sitting on the white coral beach. With her head in her arms she was sobbing fitfully and the gently rustling coconut palms above her seemed to be sighing in sympathy.

It was a run of nearly 120 miles to Borabora and with the fresh easterly trade wind we were there in twenty-four hours. Borabora we found a little different from other islands and quite interesting. The day after we arrived, they organized a big fishing drive. All the canoes of the island, about one hundred in number, were assembled at one end of the long harbour, stretching in line right across it. Then they moved forward, beating the water and frightening the fish in front of them towards the head of the harbour, where a number of stakes had been set in the form of a semicircle. Women and children caught them as they came into the trap. About three-quarters of a ton were caught in three hours and we all had fish for a few days afterwards.

We found at Borabora Alain Gerbault, the famous French single-handed yachtsman and tennis star. He had the perfect little ship for his purpose, 32 feet long, built of teak throughout with stainless steel fastenings. I was particularly interested in a little windmill on deck for driving a generator and charging the batteries. It started charging with a wind velocity of 6 miles per hour and gave up to 12 amps.

That afternoon a team of beefy natives from Fanui Bay - the Fanui Fighters - came into Viatape, where we were anchored, to clean up the locals at a game of soccer. Alain Gerbault had taught them the rudiments of the game and he captained the Viatape defenders. At four thirty, when the sun had lost some of its heat, the match started. There were three referees, but as there was only one whistle the resultant confusion was not so bad as it might have been. The chief referee was a big Jew from the Argentine who had given up civilization, taken unto himself a very nice wahine (wife) and settled down at Borabora. He had long hair like a woman and a long beard; he made a most picturesque referee. He was on board the *Ngataki* during a good part of the game enjoying a few rum punches, but in his absence the other referees ably controlled the situation.

The Fanui Fighters had a few more men than the Viatapees, so the referees helped the Viatapees. What the players lacked in science they made up for in weight and kicking power. They could kick like mules when the ball happened to be where they thought it was. Occasionally it wasn't; and the player aiming a tremendous kick at it would miss and turn a graceful backward somersault in the air. But when their bare feet connected with the ball it definitely moved and several times landed in the lagoon adjoining the field.

The pareu, or lava-lava, was the only clothing worn and sometimes, under the stress of action, it would come off. It was grand fun to see a brawny warrior tearing down towards the enemy's goal in only his birthday suit. A fast-setting tropical sun brought twilight and an end co the game. No one knew what the score was. Both sides were satisfied they had won and there were no arguments. The match was a pronounced success and everybody was happy. Afterwards all went to a chiefs house where a huge tangi and hula-hula lasted well into the night.

Borabora is a land of crabs. There are all sorts and varieties of them, from the huge coconut crabs with claws as big as a man's fists, to the small, delicately coloured variety that roam round on land or sea. The main street, or rather the main track, was full of large holes, each one harbouring a big crab. Walking along the track at night was rather nerve-racking, especially if one was barefooted, as we generally were, for the only noise was the scuttling of the crabs, and you never knew when you would stand on one or put your foot down a hole. The crew spent many leisurely hours looking for crabs and by the time we were ready to leave we had quite a selection.

After a stay of ten days at Borabora we were ready to leave. They have there a very pretty custom of decorating a ship and its crew with sweet-smelling flowers before departure. Throughout the islands flowers play an important part in all decorations and functions. At every dance or feast there are scores of delicately perfumed blooms in every conceivable place. The girls have them in their hair, the boys have them round their necks and everywhere else that they will "stay put" It is all very picturesque after our drab, colourless civilization. With garlands round their waists and necks and wreaths on their heads, the crew of the *Ngataki* looked really wonderful.

After our departure I put my flowers under my bunk, for these flowers seem to retain their sweet scent indefinitely after they have withered. A month afterwards I took them from their hiding place. They were all shrivelled and dried up and looked very much like tobacco. Jack, seeing them on the table and thinking they were tobacco, made cigarettes out of them and smoked them. They were mighty powerful. He said they went to his head. Anyway, he was ill for three days. I said nothing. When he reads this, he will know for the first time what it was he smoked.

Three days out from Borabora we crossed the date line. We broached a bottle of rum and celebrated. I mean, it is not every small ship that crosses the

date line. "Well, boys, this is the second Wednesday this week. We can do anything to-day and it will not appear in our diaries." And we did. We bunged the day one back, revelled in it and forgot about it.

Two days later we were due to sight Palmerston Island, a low coral atoll lying in one of the loneliest parts of the Pacific. On this small island, barely a mile square, about eighty years ago, a William Masters had landed with his three Tahitian wives. They had established a settlement and now the population was over one hundred, all descendants of this William Masters. He had the right idea, we thought, and we would like to meet him. I took four shots of the sun which all placed us in the same position, within a mile of Palmerston Island. But of the land there was no sign. It was sad, but the island must have sunk. We hove-to for the night over the place where the island ought to have been and strained our ears for the sound of breakers. The next morning there was still no sign of land.

That night I listened for a time signal to check the chronometer. But no signal was forthcoming. Wellington (where we generally got the signal) was singing hymns. I tried Auckland. Auckland was singing hymns. "It's funny," said Nip, "New Zealand must have gone religious all of a sudden. There must be a war on or something. Singing hymns on a Friday!"

"Yes," I said. And then the truth dawned on me. It was not Friday. It was Sunday. That was reasonable. When we crossed the date line and put the day back, we should have put it forward. This put the declination of the sun over a degree out and as a result we were seventy miles south of Palmerston Island. It was not worth while going north now, so a course was laid for Savage Island, or Niue, 400 miles away. Three days later the low, indistinct form of Savage Island appeared over the horizon. The locals here seemed to know all about the *Ngataki*. They had heard our broadcast talks from Hobart and Auckland. There did not seem to be very much savage about them now. A fleet of fifty-four canoes (we counted them) came out to escort us in. An odd three hundred natives - boys and girls - swam out to welcome us.

Some New Zealanders possibly think that their country cannot look after Pacific Islands. To us it was a real pleasure to stay at an island under New Zealand administration. The natives were well looked after. Their habits and customs were studied. They got a good price for their produce. All the islands we had previously visited had been French and the difference in administration was most apparent. The British may make mistakes, but I know of no country that makes fewer. We were most hospitably entertained by the acting Resident Commissioner, Mr. McMahon Box and, for that matter, by the whole island. We had a car at our disposal - for there were cars here (six of them) - and a surf boat waiting on us day and night. We spent six most pleasant days on the island, the longest that any boat has ever stayed there, for there is no anchorage. We were tied up to a surf boat uncomfortably close to the fringing reef and we had two natives on board day and night, watching the wind and the weather, so that we could put to sea immediately

the wind became unfavourable. The depth at our mooring was 24 fathoms and we could see the bottom as clearly as if there was no water there at all. It was the clearest water we had seen to date.

We were much amused by the native courting customs on Savage Island. The lover goes off alone at night carrying a length of bamboo. Quietly he picks his way through the village until he comes to the hut he is seeking. Peering inside by the light of the moon he sees his lady friend sleeping in company with two or three other girls. Quickly he ties a feather to his bamboo rod and thrusts it through a hole in the hut. With the feather he tickles the lady's nose until she wakes up. This was apparently the only known way of waking the desired girl without disturbing the others in the hut.

Some of the girls on Savage Island have the most extra-ordinary names. The explanation is simple. The godfathers and godmothers, wishing to give them English names and not knowing the language, often chose the first English word they heard. Some of the girls were called "Threepence", "Sixpence", etc., while quite a number of them had names that were definitely unprintable. Their fathers must have listened to the fluent profanity of some hard-case traders to have picked up some of the words they afterwards used as names for their offspring.

From Savage Island it is only 300 miles to Vavau, in the Friendly Isles, which was our next port of call. With a fresh easterly trade wind it took us only two days.

The time was spent in renewing old acquaintances and generally having a good time. After a week we were ready to leave, but as Arthur had now developed a poisoned leg from a coral cut we decided to postpone our departure for a few days. We had to be very careful of cuts throughout the islands, especially of those from the sharp coral. The slightest scratch was liable to become septic if not properly looked after. Four days later Arthur was well on the way to recovery. We put a barometer on his stomach and noted a perceptible movement of the needle towards "very dry", so we had a few beers and the next day he was all right. But the weather had changed. There were fierce squalls and thunderstorms alternating with calms and we would have made little headway had we left. It was not until November 24th that the trade wind started again and we left for Auckland, 1,300 miles away.

But, unfortunately, it was not the trade wind. In these parts, the trades blow fairly steadily for eight days, followed by a variable spell for two or three days, and then start off again for another eight days. But now our wind gave up the struggle on the second day out. About midday we were quite close to an island called Bangimotu. We drifted towards it and, with the help of Methuselah, we got into the lagoon. Here we anchored, for it was not much use sailing under these conditions. Besides, we wanted a few coconuts to take back to New Zealand.

Jack and I went ashore, where we found a little native girl, Loti, whom I had met on my previous trip to the Friendly Isles. The weather being fine, we

decided to spend the night ashore. The next day the wind came up from the south - a head wind. Head winds are no good to anyone and so we stayed on, for it was a good anchorage. The wind remained in the south for the next few days, during which we lived ashore among Loti and her happy-go-lucky native friends. Every night the native boys went down to the coral beach by the lagoon and beneath the rustling coconut palms and the tropical moon sat and sang to the accompaniment of a string band. At their invitation we readily joined in. After the sing-song everyone would repair to one of the huts for a "faikava". This was a ceremony at which all present sat round a large wooden bowl and drank kava, the universal native drink, made by mixing water with the crushed, dried kava root. It tasted something like soapy water when you first tried it but, like beer, one soon acquired the taste. If you had too much you noticed a definite wobbliness in the legs, although the head remained clear. Kava is supposed to be good for the kidneys - it is strongly recommended by many doctors for kidney trouble - and so, during those carefree nights ashore, our kidneys at least were well set-up and fortified.

But, if my kidneys were pickled against decay, I was still open to other forms of infection. On the fifth day of our stay I was attacked by some form of tropical sickness and things were not too good. For the next few days I lay in a little grass shack and sweated and tossed under the influence of the fever. But the local medicine-man had the stranglehold on the situation. Two or three times a day he brought leaves to Loti, who boiled them and gave me the liquor to drink. Then she brought other leaves and rubbed them into my skin. Each night the faithful Loti sat by my side, never sleeping, always watching to see I was properly covered and always ready to get anything I needed. The motherly devotion she displayed towards a comparative stranger was strangely moving. Several times every night I would wake from a restless sleep to find her silently sitting by my side, anxiously watching me. Those leaves, with Loti's care and attention, did the trick and in five days I was back to normal again.

It was now well into the hurricane season and, much as we would have liked to, we could not afford to stay any longer. So a couple of days later we bade good-bye to Loti and her loyal friends and got under way with a fresh easterly wind, heading for our old friend, Sunday Island, to pick up Reg Randell and take him back with us to New Zealand. The trade wind was pretty fresh and we carried a single reef most of the way. The seas were fairly big and quite a lot of spray came on board. But we did not mind. We were making good time and five days later Sunday Island was visible, barely 6 miles away at daybreak.

The sea was much too rough to anchor here, for the northern beach, where the settlement was, was a lee shore. *Ngataki* was hove-to about half a mile out and our dinghy was launched. I rowed ashore to Fishing Rocks, where I knew Reg would be waiting. The waves at the rocks were over 15 feet high and getting anything on board was definitely tricky work. Alf Bacon stood well up

on the cliff and directed us. He could see the big seas coming. "Now's your chance, Johnny - after this one - now - go for it!" And I would row frantically in and Reg would throw me something. One moment I was below Reg as he stood on the rock; the next moment I was being whirled round in a surging mass of turbulent water and Reg was hanging on for dear life as a sea broke over the rock.

It was highly exciting. It would have needed only one slip for the dinghy to be dashed to pieces on the sharp rocks, in which case my chances of regaining the ship would have been hopeless. When I had all his gear aboard, Reg dived into the surging waters and I picked him up. After a long, hard row we reached *Ngataki*. Her nose was turned towards Auckland and it seemed she was very keen to get there.

The wind was north-east-dead behind. We ran up a spinnaker and with full sail *Ngataki* was soon doing eight knots. It was the best and most comfortable run we had had to date. We carried the wind right through to Auckland. Four days later we arrived. The log read 705 miles and we had done it in exactly four days - 176 miles a day - and an average speed over the whole distance of seven and a half knots. We were very proud of this record trip and did not fail to let everybody know about it.

A Feast At Papeete

A Typical Tahitian Scene

Approaching Murea

Ngataki at Murea

CHAPTER XIV

In A Hurricane

It was summer time in New Zealand and the weather was ideal for cruising. For a couple of months I made an honest penny by taking pleasure parties out in the boat. Then I began to long for the blue water again. It is very funny. When one is at sea, one dreams of green fields and nice, solid land. One sets extra sails in order to make port as soon as possible. But after a week or two of harbour life one begins to dream of deep water and the free and easy life out at sea.

But it was really a meeting of the Ngataki Club that started off our next trip. The Club was still an active body and when we were in port "meetings" were held every fortnight. On this occasion a selected group of members had gathered in the cabin and, over a keg, were discussing as usual boats in general and *Ngataki* in particular.

"Do you realize," said my brother Geoff sternly, "that you haven't been out to sea now for nearly three months?"

That, as I say, started it off. Within an hour details of a trip to Norfolk Island were finalized. Besides, there were some people there who wanted to return to New Zealand, so we would go and bring them back.

A couple of days later, on Monday, the 23rd March, 1936, we waved farewell to a small group of friends and slowly sailed away from the Royal Akarana Yacht Club. Eddie Ansell, Don Alexander and myself were the crew and we were bound for Norfolk Island, 700 miles away. The breeze was light but fair and at a modest four knots we headed for the wide open spaces. At 6 p.m. we dropped into "deep-sea" routine and set watches - three hours on and six hours off.

The first couple of days passed uneventfully as we slowly sailed up the New Zealand coastline. The second evening Cape Brett, the last of New Zealand, was passed and we set a course north-west by west for Norfolk Island.

That evening I got a time signal for our chronometer, and listened to the weather report: "A severe tropical cyclone is centred west of Norfolk Island,

moving south eastwards. In the eastern Tasman Sea there will be strong easterly gales and rough to high seas."

That didn't sound too good to us aboard *Ngataki*, but an east wind was a fair wind for us and a gale need not be too bad - a bit tricky on the steering, perhaps, but we would make good time. My boat was strong and could stand any storm. They didn't say how intense the cyclone was and, anyway, our glass showed no signs of it yet ... And so we carried on.<

Sometime during my watch a blaze of lights appeared on the horizon. It was the inter-colonial liner *Wanganella*. I signalled her with my torch: "Yacht *Ngataki*. Please report us all O.K."

The next morning, Wednesday, it was blowing a hard easterly and we were swooping along before it at eight knots. As the morning drew on, the wind freshened, so that at 10 a.m. we were doing nine knots, which was a bit too much for our tubby craft. We pulled down a reef in the mainsail which made things a bit easier. At midday, even with the reef, we were driving the ship too hard. "Are you there, Don?" I yelled. "We'll have to double reef the mainsail. I can't hold her. It's starting to blow now." We had carried on too long already and it took us over half an hour to put in the second reef. The heavy mainsail pulled and thrashed like a demon. But we did not mind. There is always something exhilarating in a clean fight with the elements - provided you are sure of winning.

So we hung on and pulled at the reefing points, until eventually the devil in the sail was subdued. Now the ship was much easier. I went down to rest while Don carried on at the tiller.

I was dozing when a sudden loud report brought me back to earth. "Are you there, Johnny?" yelled Don. "Shake it up; the mainsheet's parted!"

I scrambled up and attempted to capture the boom. I grabbed one end of the broken mainsheet and tried to get the sail in. But the pressure on it was altogether too much. I pulled with all my might, but could not get the boom in an inch.

"Look out!" yelled Don. There was a crash as a huge wave hit us and I was catapulted into the air. The next second I was in the water with the *Ngataki* 15 yards ahead, sailing away from me at eight knots, running before the storm. I realized with a feeling of panic there was little hope of young Don gaining control of the ship or stopping her mad rush.

In rare moments such as these it is lucky that one has not time to dwell on the situation. I saw the log line streaming past and grabbed it, but immediately released my grip and let it slide through my hands. Just in time, I had remembered how slender was the screw that fastened the log to the deck. If I had hung on, the weight of my body would have pulled the whole outfit off the stern of the boat. "Grab the log line!" I yelled frantically. With the greatest presence of mind, Don immediately let go the tiller, grabbed the line and took a turn round the horse. At the same instant I came to the end of the line and hung onto the log for my life.

It takes a long time to describe it, but it was little more than a second from the time I was thrown off the boat to the time I was hanging onto the log. In these circumstances one has to think and act pretty quickly.

Hampered by the heavy military overcoat I was wearing, I had to put everything I had into the supreme effort of getting back to the boat. The line was light and fairly old, and every moment I expected it to part. Hand over hand, inch by inch, that 20 yards seemed more like a mile. Eventually I reached the boat. Don helped me on board and I lay for a while on deck exhausted. Only those who have tried it can know how hard it is to haul oneself through the water at eight knots.

We at length rove a new mainsheet and I went down below. I crawled into my bunk again. I had had enough excitement for one day. But apparently Father Neptune creed otherwise. An hour later I was wakened again by a terrific crash. The boat was thrown bodily to leeward midst a smother of foam and spume. Water poured through the main hatch and added to the general confusion down below. I was thrown out of my bunk and hastily scrambled on deck just in time to see Don, who had been washed overboard, climbing back on deck. He had luckily grabbed the mainsheet and was able to get back on board again. We had broached-to and it was quite clear that we had carried on too long. This was a bit too much for a joke. We would have to heave-to, even though it was a fair wind.

The staysail, now viciously kicking and thrashing, was lowered and lashed down and the mainsail was hauled hard inboard, as we hove-to. *Ngataki* came nearly head to wind and began to ride the waves easily, but she had a lot of water in her - 6 inches above the floor - and she was not too buoyant.

Eddie was down below pumping. Keeping a weather eye open to windward for breaking seas, I attempted to re-lash the dinghy which had broken adrift on deck. I was naked now, so was Don. It was no good wearing any clothes on deck under these conditions.

The wind gradually increased to full hurricane force and the mainsail was lowered, for no canvas, however strong, could have stood up to it. The seas were rapidly mounting higher and higher. Away to windward I saw a gigantic breaker advancing. From a slightly different direction another huge sea was coming towards us and it began to look as though those two hills of water would just about meet where our little ship lay. "Look out, Don," I yelled. I sprang into the rigging and climbed up the shrouds. I got 12 or 15 feet above the deck, but there was no getting away from *that* sea.

I have a dim recollection of an enormous wall of white, seething water bearing down on us, a violent, sickening crash, and the next instant I was under water. There was a deafening, roaring noise in my ears, and all the forces of the world were pulling me away from the shroud to which I clung.

The wire shroud was torn from my grasp and I was in green water, somewhere below the surface. I swam to the surface and there, a few yards away, I saw the keel of my *Ngataki* sticking up in the air. A bit of the topside

was also showing, but it seemed she was sinking fast. We were 100 miles off land; there was no hope of swimming *that* far through shark-infested waters. This, then, was the end.

For something better to do, I swam over to poor *Ngataki*, and climbed up the topside. A moment later I saw Don climbing onto the stern. We looked at each other and grinned weakly. Then, wonder of wonders, the boat began to rotate and the mast appeared. It began to rise out of the water as the gallant *Ngataki* slowly righted herself.

It was the proudest moment of my life seeing my ship right herself; even relief at being saved from a watery grave gave place to pride at that moment. I actually grinned. "How's that?" I yelled to Don. "Wonderful!" he shouted. It was. That the ballast did not break loose and burst through the cabin-floor can be attributed only to a merciful Providence. Then Eddie's head popped out of the half-open hatch. He had been down below the whole time. Sitting on the cabin-ceiling in the dark, Eddie had decided he was on his way to the bottom of the sea. Now he was intensely surprised and relieved to find the ship was still above water.

But she was only just floating. Water had poured through the partially closed main hatch and there were over 3 feet of water in the cabin. In calm water the *Ngataki* had a foot of freeboard, but now the decks were awash. We would have to work like maniacs if we were to keep the ship afloat. Our decks were swept clean. Our leeward bulwarks had been torn off and, together with lifebuoys, spars, dinghy, etc., were floating away down to leeward. But that mattered little. The main thing was to keep the boat afloat till we could get a bit closer to land. It was too far to swim from there!

"Go for it, lads, bail for your lives!" And we did, with pots and buckets and everything we could lay hands on. If we got another breaker now, we would never survive it. I groped in the water-filled lockers until I found our 5 gallon drum of whale oil. Then I attempted to pour it overboard on the waters to windward of us. But, of course, it was a hopeless task. The shrieking wind blew the oil back over my naked body and over the ship. What happened next would have been funny at any other moment but at the time the humour of it was not apparent. Crouching on deck-with the wind at hurricane force it was impossible to stand up-I tried to get a grip on something to steady myself. But the ship was so slippery from being sprayed with the blighted whale oil that I could not get a hold on anything and the next thing I knew I was being blown - sliding on my seat - right down to the stern of the ship. There I luckily grabbed the horse, or I would have gone overboard for a third time.

With an axe I cut the boom, gaff, and sail from the mast and on a couple of warps I let the whole affair out over the bow to act as a sea-anchor. But it made no difference. I let out more gear on ropes but still she would not ride head to wind. Our only hope was to run before it. I pulled in all the gear from the bow and let it out over the stern. It sounds a simple operation but it took a couple of hours to do. I could not afford to get any help from the other two,

for they were bailing incessantly.

All our sails, spars, anchors, and oil drums were tied to ropes and let out over the stern until we had lines and ropes trailing behind. The move proved very effective and as long as we kept running dead before it the floating gear behind remained to windward of us.

It was now about 6 p.m. and getting dark. We carried on, I keeping the ship dead on in the ever increasing seas, while Don and Eddie bailed for their lives. Down below was utter chaos. Everything that would float was swirling about on top of the water. Lockers, drawers and cupboards were all being smashed and burst open by the force of water surging below as the ship rolled and pitched. The floating debris considerably hampered Don and Eddie in their bailing, and every now and then a bit of board or a locker door would come flying out of the hatch as it got in the way of their buckets. They stuck to it like heroes, carrying on hour after hour. It was a case of life and death and we all knew it.

The wind blew harder than ever. I had never known anything like it. I think it was also raining, although I could not distinguish rain from spray or anything else. It was pitch dark and there was no light of any sort on board. I steered by the wind on the back of my neck.

Endless hours went by and the water below was, if anything, gaining on us. We had shipped no seas, thanks to the gear streamed out behind us, so we must have developed a bad leak somewhere. About midnight - we could only vaguely guess the time, our clocks and watches having become useless - I handed the tiller over to Don, while I crawled around the boat feeling if any of the ports had been smashed. But they were all sound. Then I remembered a little generating plant that I had recently fitted. Sure enough, the engine had come adrift and water was pouring in through the exhaust pipe. No wonder the bailers were making no headway! I plugged it up and resumed my steering.

Further endless hours dragged by. It was the longest night I had ever spent. So great was the force of wind that we were doing about five knots under bare poles and dragging all the gear behind. I could not look back, for the rain or spray - whichever it was - hurt too much, but I could take a quick peep now and then by covering my face with my hands and looking through the slits between my fingers. But all I could see was, naturally enough, fairly harmless.

At long last day dawned - a grey, cheerless dawn, but infinitely better than the horrors of darkness. We carried on all day, taking it in turns to bail, bailing, bailing, always bailing.

About 3 p.m. the wind lightened as we got nearer the centre of the hurricane, but the seas seemed to get even higher and mounted and pitched upwards from all directions. But, with the wind losing strength, the seas lost some of their terrifying breaking-crests which are so dangerous to small craft. During the comparatively calm spell the water was bailed out nearly down to

the floor. We had a good pump on board, but, with the mess that was now in the bilge, it continually got blocked and was useless. I took the opportunity of straightening out some of the rigging. A lot of the gear behind had broken away, but luckily the mainsail was still there. It was hauled in and fastened, with the boom and gaff, back in place on the mast. I climbed the gyrating mast and rove a couple of temporary halyards to haul the sail up if necessary, for we must be getting somewhere near the New Zealand coast and we might be wanting that sail soon.

It grew dark and soon after the wind started howling again, this time from the sou'-west. But to-night it was not so bad. We had most of the water out and the ship was more buoyant. Again the night seemed endless. Towards morning I thought I heard the roar of distant breakers, but the night was pitch black and nothing could be seen. At the first sign of dawn I went on deck and looked around, and there, less than a mile away down to leeward, was the rocky New Zealand coastline, with miles of merciless surf, clearly visible in the half light, thundering in.

No time was to be lost if we were to avoid being wrecked. Luckily, the wind had now moderated and we could show a little sail. The staysail and double-reefed mainsail were hoisted; we had to try somehow to claw off that rocky shore against the high wind and mountainous sea. We plugged along, the ship being more underneath than above the water. The spray flew high over the masthead, but we were getting no farther from the rocks.

We shook out a reef in the mainsail and carried on under single reef. *Ngataki* knew what was wanted of her. She heeled right over and ploughed along. If anything carried away, we were done. But the gear stood up to it and I was grateful for the heavy mast and the stoutness of the shrouds and canvas. Our gallant little craft climbed up each wall of water, shattered the top of the sea and sank into the trough again. We were winning now gradually drawing away from the hungry surf.

About 2 p.m., by the sun, Cape Maria Van Diemen was sighted through the haze. Once round there, we would be safe, but about 5 miles off the Cape there is a shallow patch which breaks even in moderate weather. Now, as we drew closer, the seas became terribly confused and started to break in all directions. Suddenly a huge sea broke 50 yards away on our beam; then one broke on the other side of us. Our stern lifted high in the air and the bow went down so far I thought we were going to turn a complete somersault. With a roar we started to plane on the sea. The bow-wave was colossal and there was a white streak of foaming water level with the deck from bow to stern as we rushed madly along at an unbelievable speed for nearly a minute. I threw every ounce of weight on the tiller to keep her dead before it. If we had swerved a fraction of a point we would have broached-to and all would have been lost. But we were lucky again and soon we were out of that ungodly sea. Darkness found us past the Cape in the relatively calmer waters of the East Coast.

There followed three days of uneventful sailing down the coast. Conditions were fairly comfortable, as comfortable as wringing-wet clothes, wet bunks and water sloshing round the floor would allow, for the weather was by no means fine and we could do no drying.

At long last we reached port. Good old Auckland! There never was a crew more pleased to see it. Without wasting any time we hurried ashore. *Terra firma* at last! There had been many times during the last few days when we thought we would never see land again.

Auckland had not suffered the full force of the storm, the centre of the cyclone passing about three hundred miles away. Nevertheless, the damage done around the water-front was very extensive. When we saw the wrecked boats, the smashed retaining walls and other obvious signs of storm damage, we considered ourselves very lucky to have escaped with our lives.

Ngataki was in a terrible mess and would have to be virtually rebuilt inside. There was no better place to do this than up the little Wairoa River. So, after a few days, we sailed inland. There was plenty of fresh water there with which to wash everything and plenty of peace and quietness to effect repairs.

Like all nasty experiences, that unhappy trip had taught me a few lessons. It had shown the remarkable effectiveness of running before a storm towing a mass of gear. We had survived a full hurricane, yet with no more than a bare foot of freeboard we had shipped very little water. Had the ship been free of water inside, we would have lived through it quite comfortably. The streaming of canvas out aft, with ropes from two corners of each sail so that they lie flat on top of the water, causes advancing breakers to break before they reach the ship. The more gear one has out aft, I decided, the safer will be the ship.

In my humble opinion, any small boat, if well found and strong enough, can live through a hurricane if it does as we did - run before it, towing all spars, sails, drums, etc., behind. It is probably the only way of riding it out - unless the boat is a small one and has a sea-anchor big enough to hold it head to wind. And even then, riding head to wind, there is an enormous strain on the rudder (which must be lashed) when a breaking sea hits it. On a larger boat, say, over 35 feet, the sea-anchor would have to be so large to keep the boat head to wind, that the strains would be too great. In a hurricane no canvas will stand up to the force of the wind, so it is, of course, impossible to heave-to. There are only two alternatives: riding to a sea-anchor, or running before it and towing gear, and, unless the boat is under 35 feet, the latter method, to my mind, is the best.

It also taught me another lesson: not to be too cocksure of myself. On the first couple of days of that trip I had thought no harm could befall us. I had been to sea several times before and I knew all about it. My ship was strong enough and could stand anything at all. I was so sure of myself that I had not bothered to stow the anchor and chain below. They were on deck all ready for our arrival at Norfolk Island. I had not even taken any special precautions in

lashing the gear on deck and I had not troubled to see that the hatches were securely fastened. I came to grief. It was only the sheerest luck that we remained afloat and escaped with our lives.

Since that unhappy trip I have been very careful. Now I am a little afraid of the sea. Captain Slocum once said that, a little fear at sea is a good thing for safety. I believe him. For just a little fear will keep you up to the mark. It will make you keep everything ship-shape and it will make you prepared for anything all the time. In a well-found boat, if you do this, no harm will befall you. But, if you do not treat Father Neptune with the respect he undoubtedly deserves, he will, sooner or later, creep up behind you with that lump of lead piping. And that will be that!

In the Trade Winds

Sunset Before a Hurricane

CHAPTER XV

A Solo Ocean Trip

It took me over two months to get *Ngataki* ship-shape again. The whole of the inside had to be scrubbed from cabin-top to keel and then repainted. The rigging had to be overhauled, the sails patched and the ship painted all over. Most of the lockers, sets and drawers inside had to be renewed. It was a long job.

A stinking mess had accumulated under the floor. Rotten eggs, rice, beans, peas, flour, etc., combined with the 6 odd tons of ballast to make a mess that can better be imagined than described. As I sat on the floor struggling with stubborn evil-smelling lumps of ballast, I told myself that I had had enough of adventure. I wanted a little peace and quiet, relaxation such as we had known on some of the more remote islands. I thought of Loti and all the happy, carefree boys and girls of the Friendly Isles. They had the right idea. As I woke on the cold, foggy mornings and dressed myself hastily to try to work up a circulation (for it was mid-winter now), I thought of all the warm sunshine that was going to waste in the Friendly Isles. It would be great to go back there and live for a while with those happy-go-lucky islanders with their guitars and their songs and their infectious laughter. Anyway ... Why not? There was nothing really to stop me. I had my ship. I could sail in her wherever I willed. I was quite independent. Dash it all, I *would* go back there. I would sail my ship back alone and stay there as long as I liked.

So it was decided. I did not wish my people to know of my plans, for they would worry too much if I went to sea single-handed, so I kept my ideas to myself.

And so, on the evening of June 5th, 1936, when the *Ngataki* slowly sailed down the Auckland harbour, it was only a very select few who knew she was heading for the Friendly Isles. Late that night I arrived off the wreck of the *Rewa*, from which I had obtained most of the gear for my boat. I anchored inside her by Charlie's little island home. A more sheltered nook than this would be hard to find and I stayed there four days, overhauling little details in the rigging and stowing away food.

Experience had shown me the necessity of proper food when at sea. The success of any long cruise depends, as much as anything, on the health of the crew, and the health of the crew depends, as much as anything, on the food they eat. So that a properly balanced diet is one of the first essentials.

Aboard *Ngataki* the food on an ocean trip is, of necessity, plain, but it is wholesome and nourishing. For breakfast we generally have coffee and boiled rice, or barley, or boiled eggs, or something in that line. A light lunch of biscuits and cheese, or pea soup, or perhaps a tin of salmon and bread; and then, about 4 p.m., we have the meal of the day - a large stew or hash of vegetables and tinned meat. This is generally a real "binder" and keeps the troops quiet for quite a time.

The food must, of course, be capable of keeping in good condition for a long time, so it must be dried, or preserved, or canned. But practically all preserved foods are lacking in one particular vitamin - vitamin C, the antiscorbutic vitamin. However, lemons will last a long time and they are rich in the vitamin C, so they are always included in the ship's stores. Onions also will keep and are rich in this vitamin if eaten raw. But they are pretty powerful, taken raw by the mouthful. So in each of our hashes and stews an onion is cut up fine and stirred in immediately before serving. If you try this sometime, you will find that it also improves the flavour. Immediately we reach land, of course, our vitamin C supply is easily replenished by the addition of fresh fruit to the stores. Raisins and peanuts are good, cheap foods, so a supply of them is carried; we always have a supply of dried peas, beans, apricots, peaches, etc. Bread is carried for the first week and then we fall back on wholemeal, rye, and ship's biscuits. When we are energetic we bake bread in our oven. It is made from wholemeal, rolled oats, four and baking powder. It is a pretty heavy line in "bread", but it is wholesome, it quickly fills aching voids and keeps things moving.

But the laying in of a suitable food supply is not the only thing to consider. We have found that the stowing of the food is equally important. Each locker has to be made quite watertight and has to be packed so that there will be no movement of the contents in a heavy sea. Which is no mean feat, even in these days. I was busy stowing stuff when Charlie came aboard.

"Well, how's it going now? Seeing everything is in good order before leaving port? Say - do you want any meat for your trip, Johnny?" he asked.

"Well, I mean, meat's always acceptable," I grinned, wondering what was coming. "What sort of meat, Charlie?"

"As a matter of fact I've got an old cow up on the hill. She's not much good for anything. I had thought of killing her and laying in a supply of meat for the winter. Bottle it, you know. It's the best way of preserving it. Better than salting it. You just cook it up with salt water and seasoning, then poke it into stone or glass jars. Then you pour in hot fat until there is about an inch of fat on top of the meat. This seals it up and then it'll last for a long time-three months at least."

"Sounds all right," said I; "it's a new one on me."

"Well, what about coming and giving me a hand? Then you can take as much meat off it as you want."

We went up and shot the poor old cow. Then we fell to and started carving it up and soon there were meat, bones and lumps of fat from one end of Charlie's house to the other. I took about a hundred pounds of meat out to the boat. I laid in a supply of firewood, lit the old stove, filled all my pots with small bits of meat and began cooking in earnest. As soon as one pot-full was cooked it would go into one of the jars which I generally carried specially for preserving foods, for one never knows when opportunity may arise. Then I would fill the pot with raw meat again. Afterwards, according to instructions, boiling fat was poured in the full jars, to the depth of about an inch, effectively sealing them. I carried on for three days, with the stove going full throttle, at the end of which every suitable receptacle on the boat was filled with Charlie's cow.

On shore Charlie was not doing quite so well. At the end of three days he was still knee-deep in meat and apparently just about holding his own with it. I helped him until all his jars were also full. Then he salted the rest down in a cask. Luckily the weather was cold and the meat kept all right until we had finished preserving it. You might possibly think, as I did, that there is only a few hundred pounds of meat on the average cow; but it you ever try bottling one you will quickly find that there is tons and tons of the stuff.

On June 10th a light westerly sprang up and rapidly freshened. West was a fair wind, so we got under way. "We" because, after all, I *did* have a crew - a small kitten, by name Rasmic. course was laid for Motu Hinau, one of the outlying islands. Night came and the tiller was pegged so that the ship steered herself and, having set the alarm clock (which I had invested in specially for the occasion) to wake me in an hour's time, I turned in. There was a fair bit of shipping on the coast and I exhibited a bright light to lessen the chance of the boat being run down by any steamers. It would, I always think, be definitely disconcerting to see the bow of a steamer coming through the side of the boat as one lay in one's bunk. About 11 p.m., awakened by the raucous bell of the alarm clock, I found the ship ploughing along, but carrying too much sail for the wind then blowing. We had now passed the Little Barrier Island and there was not much more land to be worried about. I pulled down a reef and, having set the alarm again, I once more turned in. Each hour the alarm woke me. I would get up, see at everything was all right, set the alarm and turn in again. About 8 a.m. Motu Hinau was about 10 miles away on the beam and I laid a course north-east by north for my old friend Sunday Island. It was on very nearly the same course as the Friendly Isles, so we would waste no time by calling there. Besides, I wanted to get some oranges.

We were averaging six knots leading before the ever increasing wind and sea. Some time in the afternoon the last sign of New Zealand disappeared in the haze behind me and I was alone amidst endless miles of turbulent water.

There was no turning back now. I had to be prepared to take whatever weather Father Neptune offered and make the best of it. I was a little bit nervous, after that last hell-trip of ours and I resolved to keep everything up to the mark and take all precautions. I put out two life-lines - two very long ropes trailing out over the stern, which I towed behind me all the way to Tonga. Just in case I rolled overboard. I mean, it would be an infuriating predicament to fall overboard in mid-Pacific and watch your boat sail away from you. When there were others on the boat there was always the chance they could put about in time to grab the body, but, single-handed, that chance disappears. A long rope streaming out aft is a better life-saving appliance than any number of lifebelts or life-jackets. A lifebelt is not much good to a man left behind in mid-ocean. It would merely prolong the agony. But a rope trailing gives a man a reasonable chance. In boisterous weather, when the ship is moving fast, we lengthen the rope to about 80 or 90 feet, to give the distressed mariner a longer time in which to grab it. In fine weather a short line of about 30 or 40 feet is sufficient.

Later in the afternoon a huge, black cloud loomed up behind us and the wind freshened in gusts. A heavy squall was approaching, so I lowered the mainsail and ran before it under staysail. That dashed squall lasted most of the night, so the tiller was pegged and the crew turned in, leaving the boat leading at about four knots under the staysail. Under this rig the ship was quite stable and held a good course.

The day dawned grey and cheerless with a southerly wind of gale force. The seas were quite big enough now and *Ngataki* was getting tossed about unmercifully. We remained under the staysail only all that day for I did not want to drive the ship too hard. But the motion produced by the steep seas was altogether too violent and by no stretch of imagination could you say things were comfortable. Rasmic was a cot-case and I was definitely feeling indisposed. In the evening the weather looked even worse and I was compelled to lower the staysail and run before it under bare poles. Now the motion was even worse, for, with no steadying canvas, the ship almost rolled her decks under. At 7 p.m. a sea broke over the stern and filled up the cockpit. This was not so good. I let out half a dozen ropes and three sails over the stern and this prevented any further water coming aboard.

I turned in and tried to sleep, but the violent motion rendered sleep impossible and I mused on the folly of going to sea. Eventually I fell into a troubled sleep and woke next morning to find the wind moderating a little. A reefed mainsail was practicable and the old *Ngataki* began to reel off the miles. The boat was still rolling badly in the heavy sea and I was still feeling seedy. In the evening my first hot meal produced quite a different outlook on the situation and things began to look better. Even Rasmic began to sit up and take notice.

The next day, Saturday June 14th, dawned much better. A fresh south-west wind and the sea going down well. We tried out the new square-sail, but

found the ship was rather unstable under it and I still had to steer most of the day. I was trying to get a combination of sails under which the ship would sail herself, but, running this, I could never leave the tiller for very long. Under headsails alone she would run or lead indefinitely, but under that rig she would not go the knots. At night I generally lowered the mainsail and let her go under headsails alone. That day I had my first swim and Rasmic and were feeling a ball of muscle. The boat was going well and everything in the garden was lovely.

The next two days were grand. The weather fine and bright; the wind fair; the boat making good headway and the crew even indulging in a little sun-bathing. But the wind was rather too cold for this yet and it was more from bravado and the novelty of it than from any comfort that I exposed the Wray person to the ultra-violets.

But it seemed that the Pacific at this time of the year could not stay quiet for long. Monday brought a lot of mackerel cirrus clouds with a prospect of heavy weather from the north-west. On Tuesday at noon I was in latitude 31° 20' S., longitude 179° 35' W., or about a 120 miles from Sunday Island. But the wind was hard northerly now and the ship was punching into head seas with the spray flying high over the mast. I was somewhere near Harvre Rock and l'Espérance Rock, the southernmost rocks of the Kermadec Group, of which Sunday Island is the main island; but the visibility was very poor and owing to the heavy weather I could not determine my position very accurately from the sun.

As the morning progressed the weather grew worse, the wind and rain increasing, and with the proximity of dangerous rocks I did not like the situation at all. In short, I had the wind up. Those rocks were said to be fairly solid and there would be very little give in them if I hit them. At 11 a.m. I turned and ran from where I thought the rocks were - on a south-westerly course, heading back to New Zealand. It did not seem right, but I wanted to put a few miles between the rocks and the ship before I was compelled to heave-to by the ever-increasing wind.

At 3 p.m., having averaged seven knots for four hours, I double reefed the mainsail and hove-to for the night. It was really dirty now and the darkness at 5 p.m. did not improve matters much. It was one of those nights when you sit around the fire at home, listening to the wind shrieking overhead and the heavy rain pattering on the windows, and you say, "God help the sailors on a night like this." But the ship was quite comfortable hove-to and, strange to say, I had one of the best night's sleep I ad had on the trip. While the folks on land might have been saying "God help the sailors", etc., this sailor, at any rate, was deeply immersed in an Edgar Wallace in a warm bunk and quite as comfortable as anyone on land. Before I went to sleep I had a quick look out through the hatch. It was pitch dark, raining and blowing hard. Keeping a look-out for rocks to-night would be quite useless. I couldn't see a yard in front of me. So I turned in and had a comfortable sleep.

I was dead to the world until the next morning, when I found the wind west-sou'-west and still of gale force. With a double-reefed mainsail I ran east-nor'-east to pass, I calculated, about 8 miles south of l'Espérance Rock. About 11 a.m. I think I passed it, but visibility was far too poor to see it, although it is 230 feet high. I carried on, keeping the ship dead before the big seas. With the mainsail up I could not leave the tiller at all under these conditions, for each wave had to be watched as it mounted up behind. At dusk we hove-to again, under the same conditions as last night. It was not until everything was snugly fastened down and I had come below to look at the chart that I found I was practically on top of a place where there was a shoal reported. Its existence was now doubted, according to the Admiralty charts, but still it would be just like me to find that dashed shoal on a night such as this. However, it was useless trying to keep watch. I couldn't see a yard in front of me and, even if I could, I would not have been able to do much with the ship in such weather. So I turned in again, finished the Edgar Wallace and enjoyed another good night's sleep.

I awoke next morning relieved to find the ship had not been wrecked overnight. The wind had moderated considerably and was now quite comfortable, as l ran before it under a single reefed mainsail. Gradually the wind died away and at 11 a.m. I shook out the reef and *Ngataki* had her full mainsail again. Here I saw a lot of discoloured water that resembled a shoal patch, but there was no break on it. I sailed through it and examined it closely. It was caused by huge quantities of a spongy sort of sulphur that had evidently been produced by a submarine eruption. Very probably this is what the steamer saw which had reported a shoal in this locality.

About 1 p.m. I sighted Macaulay Island from the masthead. Loud cheers! This is only about 80 miles from Sunday Island. The thing to do now was naturally to celebrate. I broached a bottle of rum and I gave Rasmic a little spot. He took to it like duck takes to water and for the rest of the day he was tearing around the ship in ever-decreasing circles. Nobody in the world was happier than I that day as I went about my work, while *Ngataki* sailed herself towards Sunday Island, which we were due to sight to-morrow.

Sure enough, about ten the next morning I sighted Sunday Island 40 miles ahead. About 4 p.m. we were still about 10 miles off and there was no hope of getting there before dark. So we hove-to and waited till next morning to approach the place. It is not wise to get too close to these uncharted islands in the dark.

About 4 a.m. I got under way again and a few hours later saw me sailing along the northern beach, looking for some signs of the two inhabitants. I blew the conch shell - our fog-horn - and scanned the shore through glasses, but there was no sign of them. Where were the smoke signals we usually saw? Where were the figures wildly waving shirts and tearing up and down the beach? I waited and mildly speculated as to what had become of them. They might be away hunting, but I knew it was Bruce's custom every morning to

scan the horizon for boats. I would have to go ashore and investigate.

I sailed a couple of miles back to the landing rocks and there I saw them, pulling towards me in their surf boat. I had not expected this, but I now found that they kept the boat at the rocks and had erected a derrick there with which to launch it. We anchored and the next two hours were spent in exchanging items of interest, while I consumed Sunday Island oranges-the best in the world. They had thoughtfully brought out a sugar-bag full.

About midday we got their gear ashore and landed ourselves, hauling up their boat after us by means of the home-made derrick. No trouble at all. The weather was perfect now and the sea was calm on this side of the island.

We went up to their hut, "The Mansions", and I had my first Sunday Island meal, which proved a welcome change from the preserved food of *Ngataki*. Kumaras, pumpkin, taro, beans and roast goat; tomatoes, lettuce and onions; followed by a gallon of orange juice between the three of us. I sat back for an hour or so to let the gastric juices have a fair go at that binder before gathering a case of oranges to take back to the ship. I was disappointed to find that I had just missed another ship which had called there the previous day in the course of a Pacific cruise. What with two ships arriving on consecutive days, Sunday Island was having a real busy time with shipping. The emigrants complained that the place was getting more like London every day and if the shipping continued to increase they would have to try and find a quieter island. Still, the other vessel was the only ship, other than *Ngataki*, that had called at the island.

At 7 a.m. the next morning Bruce came out in the surf boat and we went ashore, this time through the surf' on the beach. It was quite calm and I could have got through in my dinghy. There was a lot of Sunday Island I wanted to see, for it is an interesting place, so we stared out on a sight-seeing expedition. Tourists, no less. That is insofar as we both carried cameras and were looking at interesting things in a strange place. But I doubt if we would have been appreciated in Piccadilly or Broadway. Anticipating a capsize, we had worn no clothes through the surf and now, between us, we had only one scanty pair of shorts and one torn shirt. I wore the shirt and Bruce wore the shorts. I had not had a shave for three weeks and Bruce had not had a shave or a haircut for eighteen months, so we did not look exactly the conventional tourist. Alf took a photo of us before we started, but I regret that owing to the shortness of the shirt, and the scantiness of the shorts I cannot publish it.

First we visited the beautiful green and blue lakes in the centre of Sunday Island. As we looked down upon them that fine bright morning from the edge of 1,000 foot cliffs, they looked really wonderful. But it would take a more able pen than mine to do justice to the quiet beauty of that scene.

From there we climbed down into the crater of a long extinct volcano. It was called "fairyland" by the locals: it was no misnomer. There was an area as big as the average house of flat ground, covered with the softest and most beautiful green moss. It was about 6 inches deep and made not the slightest

sound when one walked on it. From the walls of "fairyland" this moss hung down in tiers, interspersed here and there with delicate ferns and small palms. The silence seemed uncanny, although it was frequently broken by faint chirps from some tiny multi-coloured birds that flitted around in the ferns above us. It was a perfect setting and, personally, I would not have been in the least surprised to see a little gnome appear from behind one of the ferns and wave a wand at us. As we climbed out of the place, I looked back, just to make sure there were no goblins there, putting their thumbs to their noses and giving us the raspberry.

The only road-makers on Sunday Island were the goats, but they were quite efficient, comparing favourably with any of our relief workers. They kept all the tracks well clear and no difficulty was experienced at all in covering quite long distances. Some steep climbs were involved, but I welcomed the opportunity to stretch my legs. At last it was time to get back to "The Mansions". We stopped along the beach to refresh ourselves with a hot bath, for Sunday Island has all modern conveniences. A stream of hot water flowed immediately underneath the sand in a certain place on the beach. It gets colder as it nears the sea, so the temperature of your bath depends on how close you are to the sea.

We arrived back and got outside another good Sunday Island "binder". They had plenty of all varieties of vegetables - more than they could ever use as well as fruit, meat and fish. I was pleased to see two coconuts, that I had left there a couple of years before, growing well. Some day, perhaps, there would be plenty of useful coconut palms on Sunday Island and, if the place ever becomes civilized, the future settlers will be able to thank me for the most useful of all tropical trees - the coconut palm.

We gathered a few cases of oranges and took them down to the boat. The weather was still calm, but the sky had assumed a threatening appearance with the promise of plenty of wind, so I thought it wise to get under way. Just before dark I bade good-bye to Bruce and Alf, hoisted the sails and got under way on the second stage of my voyage to the Friendly Isles. At 7 p.m. I got the weather report from Auckland to see if they had any information to explain the unhealthy appearance of the sky here. Sure enough, the weather report spoke lightly of severe tropical cyclones centred over the New Hebrides group. As I listened I thought how much we sailors of the high seas would appreciate it if the announcers would incorporate with their reports a sympathetic word of sorrow at the bad tidings they bring. I mean, they ought to start off by apologizing for the report they are about to give and finish up by wishing us the best of luck and hoping we don't get it too bad. To announce so highly important a message as a weather forecast in the same tone in which they give the price of fat porkers is really too bad.

I would have liked to stay at Sunday Island longer, but it is no place for a ship when the weather cuts up rough. If there were only a sheltered anchorage it would, I think, be one of the best islands in the Pacific, if not in the world.

Despite the weather report, the next day was perfect and I spent the time swimming and sun-bathing. The storm warning was still in the upper clouds, but the sunset was nice and red, so to-morrow, at least, ought to be fine. And it was. Another perfect day, a continuation of the first. But the next sunset was a misty, fiery yellow. It was a wonderful sight, but, if ever anything promised dirty weather, that did.

Dawn found a south-west gale blowing. With double reefed mainsail I was doing seven knots, running before it. The seas were getting bigger all the time. The barometer was steadily dropping and was now 29.65, which was very low for these latitudes, where the slightest fall in the glass generally produces a gale of wind. It looked as though another hurricane might be coming this way. I was not too keen about it, after our last experience. I remembered the old seaman's saying: "Long warning, long last; short warning, soon past." I had had a warning of this for nearly a week and was not feeling very comfortable about it. As the day progressed the wind and sea increased. At midday I still was tearing along with double-reefed mainsail, but I could not last at that exciting pace in these seas. It was too much like hard work trying to keep the boat before it, so, watching my chance, I rounded the ship up in the trough between two heavy seas and lowered the mainsail.

It was just as well I did, for soon afterwards it started to blow in earnest. The wind and sea increased and we moved faster and faster under the staysail. As it was not hard steering so, I carried on, making good time. But suddenly a huge sea banked up behind; our stern lifted to it, our bow went down, then, with a roar, we started to plane down its back. For perhaps fifteen seconds we tore madly along, with a 10-foot bow-wave roaring, while I struggled with the tiller to keep her dead before it. There is no greater thrill imaginable than that produced by a heavy yacht planing before a huge wave. It would, perhaps, have been a pleasant thrill if there had been another boat standing by to pick us up when we broached-to, or if we had been a bit closer to land. But alone in mid-ocean it is too dangerous a practice to produce anything but cold shivers down the spine. As soon as we had stopped planing, I rushed for'ard and quickly lowered the staysail.

In the evening the usual conglomeration of sails and ropes were streamed over the stern, as was now becoming my regular practice in very heavy weather. In this way we spent a moderately comfortable night. The next morning the gale had increased to full storm force. I needed no sails that day to drive me along. I stood all day in the cockpit, keeping the boat dead before the seas, which were now really terrifying. They were about 30 feet high and 100 yards between the hissing, breaking rests. I looked behind at each sea with growing apprehension. I was in the hurricane zone and this was beginning to look very much like one. Again I had the wind up, somewhat vertically this time. It seemed that every one of the huge breakers around me was hungrily striving to swallow us up. *Ngataki*, to me, had always felt fairly comfortable and solid, especially in a sheltered harbour, but out here she was

completely dwarfed by these mountains of water. Luckily I shipped no heavy seas. It was really extraordinary, considering they were breaking all around me. To use an Irish expression, in fact, the thing that struck me most was the number of breakers that missed me. Doubtless my long tow-lines had something to do with it.

The evening brought no abatement. I let all my spare spars, ropes and sails out over the stern again, put my faith in Providence and turned in. I remembered what an old sea captain had once told me: "No wind will last at strong gale force for more than three days." It had been at gale force now for two and a half days, so, according to my authority, the morning ought to see the finish of it. The old sea captain was right - as they generally are - for the morning found the storm moderated to half a gale. I got under way under the staysail. The seas were just as big, but they had lost some of their breaking crests. As far as I was concerned the waves could be as big and high as they liked as long as they did not break. I was much relieved to find conditions moderating, for the last two days had been rather a strain on the constitution. Reading it over now, that storm does not seem to have lasted very long, but sometimes two days can seem like two months; it certainly seemed ages since I had had any decent weather. About 2 p.m. I hoisted the reefed mainsail. The weather was looking much better and the wind showed signs of backing to the south-east and becoming a steady trade wind.

The next morning the wind was south-south-east. This looked like the trades at last. And about time too, I shook out to full mainsail and with a light heart averaged six knots all day, crossing the Tropic of Capricorn. My noon position was latitude 23° 05' S., longitude 175° 06' W. only about 100 miles to go to the Friendly Isles. But that evening I got a wireless time signal, the first for four days, and found my "chronometer" - a four-and-sixpenny pocket watch - was four minutes out. This put us nearly 60 miles too far to the west and meant that the Friendly Isles were now up to windward.

That night what I thought was the steady trade wind finished with a tremendous squall that came out of the blue when I was least expecting it. The mainsail ripped from head to foot. I struggled and heaved in the darkness, trying to save it as much as I could, but I did not improve matters much. While I was struggling with jammed halyards a big sea threw me against the sail and I went clean through it! The squall went as quickly as it had come and left me with torn sails and a rough sea.

I spent all the next morning trying to sew up the mainsail, but I could not make much of a job of it with the ship rolling. The bottom half was easily repaired, so I reefed the sail from the gaff down, hove-to with this small sail and waited for the wind, which was now light and ahead, to change. I could do nothing with those sails and a head wind.

About noon I sighted Ata. That was something. I had sighted my first tropical island. Ata is a high, uninhabited island about 80 miles from Tonga. The next morning I was quite close to the place. Although it is so close to the

Friendly Isles, it does not, according to the *Pilot Book*, belong to them. It seems that nobody has yet claimed the place and there is no record, that I know of, of anyone ever landing there. I considered calling in and hoisting the British flag, but I was not quite sure of the procedure. Anyway, on approaching closer, the island looked altogether too magnificently rugged and inhospitable to attempt a landing. No wonder that nobody wanted the place.

For the next four days the wind remained the same, light north-east, and I could do nothing with it. But I did not mind. The weather was absolutely perfect. If I had left New Zealand in search of warmer climes, I had certainly found them now. For the first two days I roasted in the tropical sun, but after that it was too hot and I gave it up. For a week I wore no clothes at all, not even at midnight on deck. There were only four degrees difference in temperature between midday and midnight. What a difference between this and the cold New Zealand weather!

After we had cleared Ata I noticed Rasmic go over to the windward rail and place his front paws on it. With his head high in the air he started sniffing vigorously. He had smelt the Friendly Isles, although they were still 70 miles away! I also took a deep breath. Yes! It was there all right. A very faint, yet unmistakable, smell of coconuts and scented bush.

On Wednesday, July 1st, Father Neptune sent us a fair wind and we began to make headway again. Early the next morning I sighted Tongatabu, the main island of the Friendly Isles, and a few hours later I made the Biha pass, that leads to Nukualofa. Negotiating the pass was rather tricky work single-handed, for, with an overcast sky, the coral could only be seen from the masthead. I would steer, then peg the tiller and climb quickly up the mast, look for coral, climb down again, rush back co the tiller and alter the course. This went on for over two hours. for the passage is about 9 miles long and there are a few sharp bends. Under the jury rig I now had up, the boat was very slow in answering the helm, so that I was very glad when we had left the breaking reefs behind and were in the calm waters of Nukualofa. At 11.30 a.m. I tied up to the buoy off the wharf, having been four weeks and three days at sea.

I spent two days there, getting the ship cleared and laying in some more food. I still had a fair supply of Charlie's cow on board. The meat was some of the best I had ever tasted. It was still in perfect condition and remained so until it was finished, three months later.

After a couple of days there I left for the island of Bangimotu and soon afterwards the *Ngataki* was anchored n the lagoon there. I found all my native friends there, exactly the same as when I had left them, nearly a year ego. Loti was there with her infectious laughter, the string bands still played on the beach in the moonlight, and the "faikavas" still went on at night.

I joined them.

"The Mansions," Sunday Island

Bruce Robinson on Sunday Island

Sailing with Tiller Pegged

CHAPTER XVI

Conclusion

I am back again in New Zealand. Working! In an office. Pushing a pen. Been doing it for about a month.

I came back because I thought life was a bit too easy-going in those lotus-eating Friendly Isles. A man would get too lazy and probably finish up by "going native". So one fine day we set sail from the Friendly Isles. It was a happy uneventful trip and a little over three weeks later we arrived in Auckland.

That was three months ago now. I spent two months looking (half-heartedly, I must admit) for a job. I then, unfortunately, found one and settled down in an office. I have been working here for a bit over a month and I cannot say I am very keen about it.

To be candid, I am beginning to loathe the sight of the place. It is only an existence here. Every morning I hurriedly eat my breakfast, rush away and jostle with countless thousands trying to gain a good seat in the bus or tram. From 8.30 a.m. until 5 p.m. I sit and toil and, except for a short hour at lunchtime, catch no sight of the sunshine or blue sky. Instead of the music of guitars coming over the quiet lagoon, I hear the incessant noise of the city. Instead of breathing the clear, sweet air of the islands I breathe the uninspiring atmosphere of the office, or the dusty smoke-laden air of the city. Instead of broad expanses of blue sparkling waters and the green coconut palms, my field of vision through the window is limited to the drab, grey side of a building. Instead of cruising with full sails in the warm trade winds, I am adding up dead figures and writing in dusty ledgers. Instead of being happy and contented with what they have, everyone is rushing about, worrying about how they can make more money for themselves. In our few leisure moments we look at the morning paper, where we read about civilized nations at war overseas; of civilized cities building bomb-proof and gas-proof shelters as a precaution against air raids.

And they call it progress!

Madness, I call it.

Every day, as I sit in the office, I ask myself why I have come back to civilization. Why I am working myself silly? I am certainly earning a moderate wage, but it is practically all going in rent, food, bus fares, clothes

and the hundred other things that the city man wants. If, by chance, I did put a little money away, by the time I had worked in the dusty city for thirty or forty years I should be too old and too poor in health to get the full enjoyment from my hard-earned savings.

Thus I have worked it all out and my mind is made up.

As a result, a fortnight later I retired from the struggle for existence and, with Rasmic, I returned to my *Ngataki*. A week later I set sail again for the Friendly Isles, in the South Seas.

If there is a moral to this story it is this: Don't give up the struggle for existence in the city. Don't go wandering in a ship around the South Sea Islands. For, if you do, the Spirit of the Wanderlust will get right into your bones and you will never be satisfied to return again to work in towns. Then you will become just a vagabond of the sea, like me. It is terrible ... and yet I don't know.

I will not go into details of that trip of mine, for you have already heard enough of our various ocean trips, but I will mention just one incident:

Arriving at Sunday Island, the half-way mark, I found it was no longer the unknown, uncivilized place that it had been on our previous visits. The New Zealand Government had established a base there with a radio station to give, among other things, weather reports to the Pan-American Airways, whose huge flying boats now pass over Sunday Island from Honolulu en route to New Zealand.

Although the party of surveyors had been on the island for five months, the place is so inhospitably rugged that they had not been able to get to the other side of the island. So, during the few days of my stay there, the *Ngataki* was commissioned to sail around the place and carry out a superficial survey of the surrounding waters.

On the second day I was at the masthead, looking out for rocks off the southern side of the island. I saw breakers a quarter of a mile away on the starboard bow. We sailed towards the rocks, so that we could take bearings from them on to Sunday Island and so establish their position.

We were within a hundred yards of the disturbed water when, to our amazement, a gigantic tentacle, easily 25 feet long, came out of the water, waved around for a second and crashed back into the water again. A few seconds later our hearts stood still as the fore part of a large whale shot out of the water barely 30 yards away and, encircling its head, its enormous tentacles thrashing the water, was a truly villainous giant octopus. This grotesque monster frequents the ocean bed and, under normal conditions, does not appear on the surface. For this reason the true cuttle fish is seldom seen by man. The present monster must have attacked the whale when the latter had sounded and the whale had wrenched its assailant off the bottom and brought it to the surface. Two more gigantic tentacles emerged, making a terrific commotion in the water. We altered course and sailed as fast as we could

away from the place.

That herculean fight between two of the sea's most powerful creatures would have been a really wonderful sight-viewed from the safety of *terra firma*. But from the less secure vantage point of *Ngataki's* cockpit one look at that hideous cuttle-fish was enough for us. As I say, we sheered off in double quick time. If that monster were to attack us, it would make short work of our little vessel. A number of big thresher sharks were cruising in the vicinity, apparently waiting for the finish of the fight and the ensuing feed. If anyone wants to go *really* big game fishing, I can heartily recommend to them the waters around Sunday Island, which abound in the largest and most terrible denizens of the sea.

When the survey was finished I set sail again and a fortnight later I arrived at the Friendly Isles.

I was soon mingling again with the happy-go-lucky islanders at Bangimotu. Once more Loti joined the crew. Once more we played and danced and sang. Once more we listened to the guitars over the quiet lagoon. Once more we sailed on the sparkling blue waters around the Friendly Isles, with our white sails bellying to the warm, steady trade winds. Once more we made an occasional honest penny by doing a little trading, catching an odd whale, or carrying a passenger or two.

As I said before, life in the Friendly Isles consists chiefly of eating, sleeping and singing. Now we have our own little string band on board. Loti plays the guitar and sings, I play the mandolin and sing and Rasmic lets in a bit of a meow now and then.

At the present moment *Ngataki* is anchored in the calm and clear waters of the lagoon off the island of Euakafa. Loti is on the near-by coral reef singing and shell-fishing. Rasmic is playing in the cockpit with a small fish that I have just landed. And I - well, I think I'll have a plunge over the side to cool down a little and then I'll go ashore and see if there are any turtle about.

FINIS

JW (left) and brother Geoffrey, with their parents, circa 1930.

JW with mother in Auckland.

WRAY. Geoffrey Branford. On August 17, 1956 (accidentally killed), at Greymouth, dearly loved son of Major W. G. Wray, Lucerne Road. Remains Cremation at Christchurch.

WRAY, Geoffrey Branford, On August 17, 1956 (accidentally killed), at Greymouth, loved brother of John Wray, Putiki Bay.

Newspaper death notices for Geoffrey Wray.

Planking almost complete during early stages of *Ngataki*'s construction.

Front view of *Ngataki* with the planking completed.

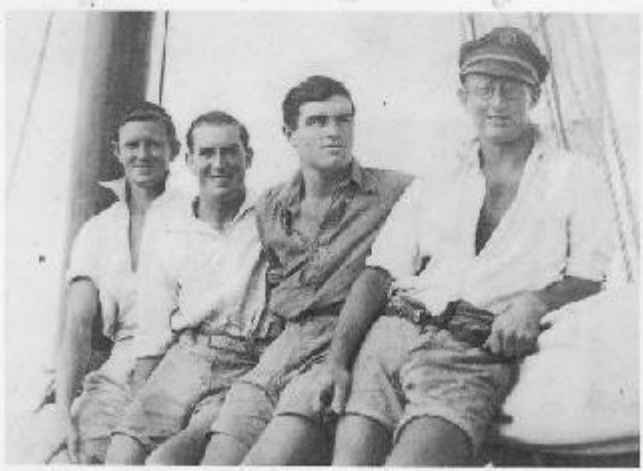
JW on the now nearly completed *Ngeiaki* in the family garden at Lucerne Road.

Ngeiaki moored off the bow of the sunken *Rewa*, at Moturekareka Island in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf.

Don Alexander and JW returning from another foraging expedition to the *Reva*.

The crew celebrating in typical style aboard *Ngatuki*.

JW (right) and crew with baskets and other souvenirs from the Pacific.

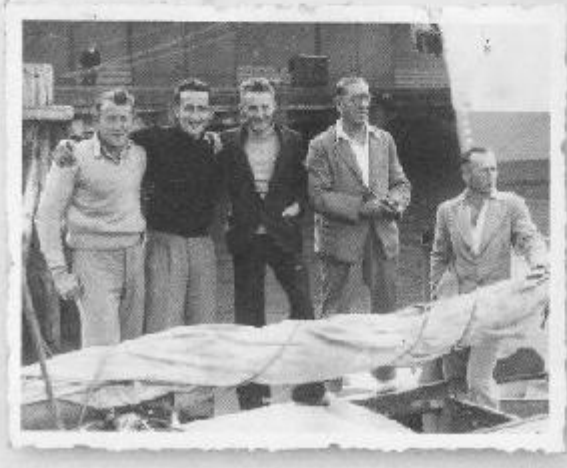


JW (right) with *Ngataki* crew, including Dick Wellington (second from right).

above JW with sextant aboard *Ngataki*.

right Page from *Ngataki*'s log, 1935.

below The crew with JW preparing to leave on a (luckless) treasure hunting trip, 1938.



The official farewell party in Auckland before *Nauaki*'s treasure hunting expedition to the Cook Islands.

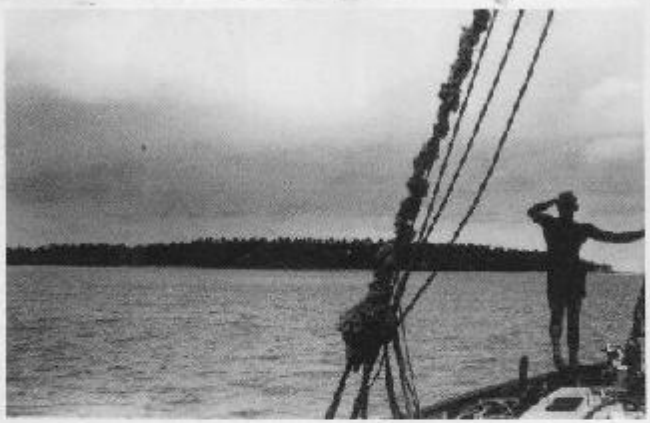
South Sea Vagabonds: JW (with ship's cat) and crew larking about in sand hills.

A rum-drinking cat prone to seasickness – Rasmic with JW and on the bowsprit of *Ngataka*.

JW up to his neck in it as usual.

The official farewell party in Auckland before *Ngataki*'s treasure hunting expedition to the Cook Islands.

South Sea Vagabonds: JW (with ship's cat) and crew larking about in sand hills.



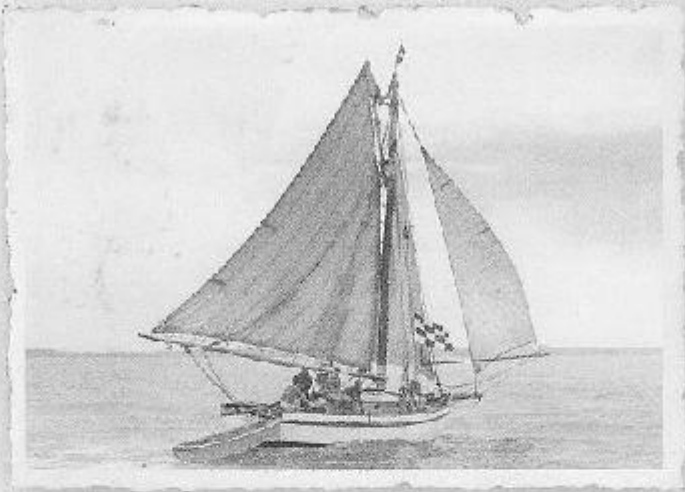
"Land ahoy!" Somewhere in the Pacific.

Two of the inhabitants of Sunday Island outside "the mansions".

JW in appropriate attire with ukulele (or possibly mandolin).

The crew in "native dress" aboard *Ngataki*.

Ngataki's 1938 treasure hunt to Suwarrow in the Cook Islands happened after the book was written, but here becomes the source of a joke involving Prime Minister Joseph Savage and Finance Minister Walter Nash.



Ngataki under full sail on the Hauraki Gulf.

Lon with the catch of the day.

Loti in formal dress and JW in uniform during World War II.

Loti outside the marital home on Waiheke Island.

JW (bottom row, second from left) with RNZAF 40 Squadron during World War II.

Lori up the mast.

LOSS FELT BY CREWS

Flight-Sergeant D. Wellington.

The tragic news of Dick Wellington (here referred to by his real name Daniel), one of the original crew on *Ngataki* and a fine yachtsman in his own right.

JW and Loti with friends aboard *Ngataki* on a fine day in Auckland.

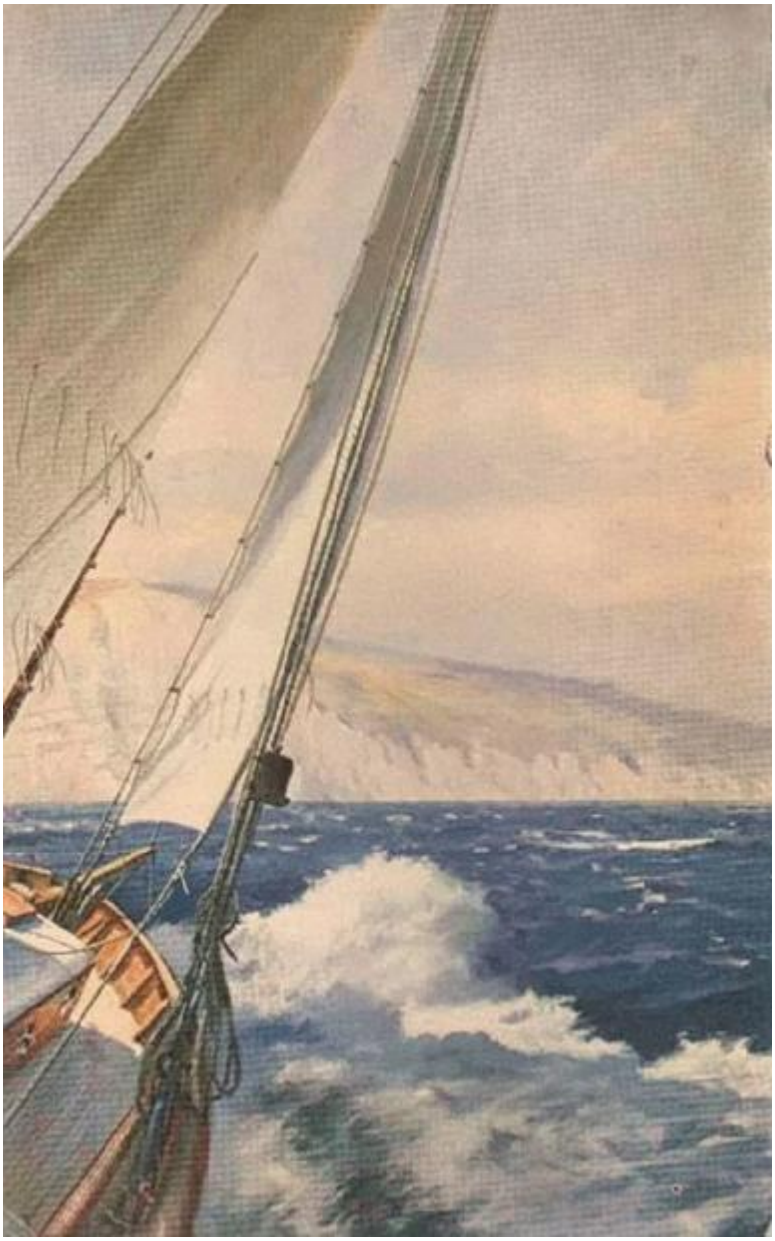
JW with the conch shell used as *Ngataki*'s fog horn.

WRAY, Charlotte (Lotti). On October 26, 1977, at Auckland Hospital, late of Waiheke Island, loved wife of John. Rest in peace. A graveside service will be held at the Waiheke Lawn Cemetery (Te Huruhi), Wednesday, November 2, 1977, at 11 am.

above left Lotti in the dinghy with a harvest of clams.

above right Newspaper death notice for Charlotte 'Lotti' Wray.

left JW circa 1960s, Waiheke Island.

top left Debbie Lewis, another intrepid owner of *Ngataki*.

above and top right Ngataki during major restoration work undertaken nearly 80 years after she was built.